



Civic Engagement 101: Knowing your Representatives & Making Connections

Moderator:

- Cally King, Senior Project Director, Keystone Policy Center

Panelists:

- Jolie Brawner, Director of Programs, The Alliance for Collective Action
- Patti Schmitt, Community Development Director, CSU Office of Engagement and Extension

Resources:

- Colorado House and Senate Schedule:
 - The full schedule of the House and Senate can be found on the Colorado General Assembly's landing page.
 - <https://leg.colorado.gov/>
 - The session schedule should be posted daily and gets updated as bills move through the process.
 - <https://leg.colorado.gov/session-schedule>
- Training Resources
 - Family Leadership Training Institute - <https://extension.colostate.edu/family-leadership-training-institute/>
 - Civic Learning Lab - <https://phps-co.org/civic-learning-lab/>
 - Rural Action Project - <https://extension.colostate.edu/resource/rural-action-project/>
- Websites:
 - [Alliance for Collective Action](#)
 - [Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension](#)

Presentation #1: Colorado Civic Engagement 101

Speaker: Jolie Brawner, Director of Programs, The Alliance for Collective Action

The Colorado Legislature: Composition

- The Senate has 35 members and the House has 65 members, for a total of 100 state representatives.
- House members are elected to two-year terms; senators are elected to four-year terms.



The Colorado Legislature: Elections

- General legislative elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years.
- The entire House is elected in each general election.
- Senators are elected in two classes with one-half of the senators elected in each general session.
- House members are limited to four consecutive terms in office
- Senators to two consecutive terms.

The Colorado Legislature: Procedure

- Regular sessions are held annually, starting by the second Wednesday in January
- Regular sessions last no more than 120 days.
- Special sessions may be called at any time by the governor upon written request of two-thirds of the members of each house, but are infrequent.

The Colorado Legislature: Joint Procedural Rules

- **Early Deadlines & Limits:**
 - Most legislation must be introduced early in the session and follow strict deadlines. Each legislator can introduce only five bills per year.
- **Pre-Session Planning:**
 - Lawmakers decide on their bills before the session starts, limiting new proposals from constituents once the session is underway.
- **Legislative Rules & Structure:**
 - The Colorado Joint Procedural Rules govern how bills are introduced, debated, and passed between the House and Senate.
- **Fairness & Transparency:**
 - Rules ensure public participation, advance notice of hearings, and orderly legislative conduct.
- **Adaptability:**
 - The legislature can amend these rules as needed to reflect changing priorities or processes.



How a Bill Becomes Law

- Lawmakers work with nonpartisan staff to draft bills.
- Once introduced, the bill is assigned to a relevant committee.
- Committee approval is required to move forward, and some bills go through multiple committees.
- Bills must pass two votes in one chamber before repeating the process in the other.
- Amendments can happen at any stage, and both chambers must approve the final version.
- The governor's signature is required for the bill to become law.

Speaking on a Bill

- You can speak on the bill in person or remotely, or submit a written statement to the committee.
- Speakers are generally limited to two to three minutes, so think about how to make your point quickly and clearly

The Colorado Legislature: What to expect visiting the Capitol

- There are two public entrances to the Capitol:
 - Off of East Colfax Avenue on the building's north side
 - Off East 14th Avenue on the south side on the basement level.
- To enter, you must go through security similar to what you'd find at an airport.

Inside the Capitol

- **Basement:** House committee rooms, legislative library, and a cafeteria with a snack bar.
- **First Floor:** Governor's office (Room 136).
- **Second Floor:** Senate and House chambers, plus some legislative offices and a committee room.
- **Third Floor:** Viewing galleries for the House and Senate, along with Senate committee rooms and lawmaker offices. **The Dome:** Open for tours weekdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; check in at the first-floor desk.

The Colorado Legislature: Basic layout (a few notes)



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- Members of the public cannot enter the floor of the House or Senate unless they are the guest of a lawmaker.
- The committee rooms are open to the public during meetings.
- If you have questions, ask the green-or-red jacketed sergeant-at-arms at the entrance to each chamber for help.

Meeting with Your Representatives

- The best conversations are prepared ahead of time.
- Know the message you want to convey to your lawmaker and explain how it is personal for you and/or your community.
- Let them know who you are, your background and why this issue/ bill is so important.
- Be specific on how you believe they should vote on the bills that are important to you.

Pulling a Representative from the Floor

- Write a note that includes:
 - Rep's name
 - Your name & zip code (if a constituent)
 - Brief reason for meeting
- Check availability – Are they accepting notes?
- Find the sergeant-at-arms – Look for the person in a green or red blazer at the chamber entrance.
- Submit your note – Hand it to the sergeant-at-arms and request delivery.
- Wait nearby – If available, your rep may step out to meet you. If not, leave your contact info for follow-up

Testifying on a Bill

- Unlike other states, every bill in Colorado must give at least one committee hearing in the respective chamber where it was introduced.
- The public is allowed to testify on legislation.
- Committees are typically where most of the debate on an issue takes place and bills are amended before they are moved to the next committee or full chamber.
- The testimony can last minutes for simple matters or hours on emotionally-charged issues.

How to Testify

- Use the calendars to find out when and where the bill will get a hearing.



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- You must sign up to testify. (Often by noon the day before)
- Arrive early to sign up on the sheet near the front of the room and wait your turn to sit at the front table in front of the microphone.
- The length of public testimony is at the discretion of the committee chairperson, but it is usually limited to 2 to 3 minutes.

The basic format for testimony is simple:

- Introduce yourself.
- State your position on the bill or issue.
- Share your personal story with two or three points to make your case.
- Restate your position with a clear ask to support or oppose.
- Thank the committee members for their attention.
- Your lived experience matters. Lawmakers want to hear real stories from real people—how policies impact your life. You don't need to be an expert; your honest testimony is powerful and resonates the most.

Advocacy Quote

“The earlier in the process, the better — but there is no wrong way to advocate except to sit it out.” — Morgan Carroll, Former Senate Leader

Presentation #2: Building Your Civic Toolbox

Speaker: Patti Schmitt, Community Development Director, CSU Office of Engagement and Extension

Civic Engagement Benefits Communities

Healthy civic engagement is tied to increased social capital – “the currency of a healthy community.”

- High levels of social capital related to:
 - Stronger sense of mutual trust & cooperation
 - Better school performance
 - Improved mental health outcomes
 - Capacity to address common social problems

Impacts of Social Isolation:

- Longest study on Human Happiness (Harvard University) recently reported:



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- 90-year low for happiness
- 40% of 16 – 24 year olds reported feeling lonely often or very often
- 61% of Americans reported feeling lonely in 2019.
- 80% of Americans say they did not get together with other people to do something positive for their community in the last year
- 25% of people report not trusting their manager
- Lack of belonging was one of the top three reasons why employees give for leaving their job
- Chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50% in older adults

Civic engagement builds social capital, strengthens trust, and improves outcomes. Isolation, loneliness, and lack of belonging undermine communities and workplaces.

Family Leadership Training Institute

<https://extension.colostate.edu/family-leadership-training-institute/>

- 20-week Nonpartisan, locally-driven leadership development initiative that provides training and opportunities to bridge gaps between local residents and decision makers to foster the co-creation of programs and policies that better reflect their communities.

Type of Experience Needed

Content Experts are:

- **Lived Experience** -People with lived experience of the situation, including children and youth. They are the people who experientially know about these issues.
- **Professional Experience** – The professionals, staff in your organization, service providers, and leaders with formal power who have knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue.

Increasing Access to Leadership Development

- **Civic Learning Lab: Community tailored leadership training** - <https://phps-co.org/civic-learning-lab/>
- **Rural Action Project (RAP)** - <https://extension.colostate.edu/resource/rural-action-project/>
- **Facilitating Community Conversations for Action Training**



“ Leadership is an activity, not a position.” Kansas Leadership Center

Storytelling Mountain framework:

- **Trailhead:** How does the story start?
- **Ascent:** What has happened and built up along the way?
- **Peak:** What is the most exciting part or the problem?
- **Descent:** What happens on the way down to resolution?
- **New Trailhead:** How does the story end? What’s different from the beginning?
What’s your takeaway message?

Magic Formula for connection:

'Hello, my name is _____, I care about (or I am passionate about)

Because

I’d love to share more about how this connects to your work. Do you have 2 minutes now or in the future to talk more about this important topic?

Example:

Hi, I’m Alex. I care about water conservation because my community depends on farming and every year drought puts more families at risk of losing their livelihood. This matters deeply to me, and I’d love to share how local efforts could connect to your priorities. Do you have a few minutes now, or should we schedule a another time?

Now it is your turn

1. **Name** – Start with who you are.

“Hi, my name is.....”

2. **Issue** – State your passion clearly.

“I care about.....”

3. **Why** – Make it personal and/or community centered.



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“This matters to me because...”

4. **Invitation and Connection** – Respect their time, connect it to them, and invite a follow up.

“I’d love to share more about how this connects to decisions you are making.
Can we take a few minutes now or schedule another time to talk more?”