



A Case Study

Rosie's Place

Rosie's Place is a community center that holistically serves poor and homeless women with various programs including meal assistance, housing, education and employment services. One of Rosie's Place's unique offerings is their Public Policy department, a two person team that promotes social justice through direct lobbying, coalition building and empowering civic engagement among the women they serve. Formalized over fifteen years ago, the department is committed to addressing guests' long-term needs through policy change.



Led by the Public Policy department, Rosie's Place conducts voter registration and offers voter education to guests year-round. Voter education takes many forms at Rosie's place. During local elections, the Public Policy team prepares and distributes non-partisan election guides that provide information about candidates. This election guide is sometimes paired with a candidate forum, where local candidates present their positions and answer questions directly related to the interests of Rosie's Place guests. For example, candidates answer questions about housing and homelessness, violence against women and substance abuse treatment. Additionally, voter education is integrated into some established programs, such as in their ESOL classes.

Every year, Rosie's place hosts a week-long Public Policy seminar for its guests. The seminar provides an in-depth look at how government works and policy is made. The week culminates with a day at the State House dedicated to lobbying and meeting legislators. This Seminar empowers the participants to make informed decisions at the polls and to further engage with their local government about issues that affect their lives.

Rosie's Place is a good example of a nonprofit that has a culture of voter and civic engagement. Their commitment has helped their community gain more visibility as they work towards policy changes that improve their guest's lives. Rosie's Place does not have a count of how many guests are engaged with their public policy services as women can take part in the work one or multiple times without requirements or boundaries; this is a model of low barrier to participation. The strength of their programming is visible in the attendance at their candidate forums and progress towards policy change.

Although Rosie's Place has robust civic and voter engagement programming, they acknowledge that for many of their guests, securing necessities for themselves and their families is their main priority. As not all guests may have the capacity to be fully engaged, the programming offered is designed to be easily accessed. That is why they do this work as consistent and accessible as possible.

Organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness have the task of providing voter engagement services that best empower the people with limited ability to participate. This takes a commitment of resources and creativity from the organization. A culture of civic engagement is not built overnight or even in a year, it is a long-term commitment. However, that commitment can help communities gain more visibility and promote changes that structurally impact the people they serve.



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