

Citizen Connect Development Proposal

An Online Portal to Scale American Civic Participation

The Challenge and Opportunity: The civic renewal movement needs more mainstream citizens supporting our work to achieve traction at scale. Right now, the citizen onboarding process is highly balkanized – with literally hundreds of organizations having proprietary outreach programs. We celebrate these individual efforts and they should continue. However, we believe that a consolidated onboarding model would help ramp up civic participation significantly. That’s why we’re building an online portal that will make it dramatically easier for mainstream citizens to find and engage with America’s nonpartisan civic reform organizations. Developing this capability will be an authentic win-win for the movement as a whole as well as for the individual players who participate.

Approach: Currently, too few ordinary citizens know about our community. Even those aware of our work struggle to find civic engagement opportunities that are aligned with their personal interests and priorities. Having a single online “front door” would dramatically increase awareness of our movement and streamline the search for ways to get involved. We see this technology and communications platform as essential for securing the citizen engagement and financial support we need to achieve our collective goals. We also see the window of time before the 2022 midterm elections and the next presidential race as an extraordinary opportunity to address and mitigate toxic polarization. Our community has the right mission and highly relevant offerings to meet this remarkable moment in our nation’s history. Citizen Connect can play a meaningful role in making sure more mainstream citizens understand what we do, why it can make a difference and how they can get personally involved.

Phase One Deliverable: For the initial release, we wanted to focus on a subset of the civic renewal movement that has a strong track record in direct citizen engagement. We were also looking to tie into a major event that would drive portal usage and thereby ensure a steep learning curve right out of the gate. These two criteria are met by the community dedicated to the interpersonal bridging of political differences – the Listen First Coalition. In addition, their leadership team was very excited about collaborating and brought many relevant management and technical skills to the table. For these compelling reasons, we decided to align our launch with the America Talks/National Week of Conversation program kicking off on June 12th. We couldn’t be more excited and honored to be working with the entire Listen First community.

Phase One Scope: Our development window is short, so we need to make sure our reach doesn’t exceed our grasp. What isn’t negotiable is that the initial release must deliver meaningful value for both the mainstream citizens using Citizen Connect and the organizations

participating in it. The functionality below reflects input from all our stakeholders and is intended to balance these tensions/constraints.

1. **The core value proposition for mainstream citizens** is to make it dramatically easier for them to find and learn about organizations working on issues that matter most to them and explore ways to get involved. This must be accomplished while avoiding information overload - a major impediment to sustained engagement. Presented with too many options, many citizens will just abandon their civic journey. This is a particular risk with Americans new to this space. We will leverage choice architecture best practices to streamline and enhance the user experience, e.g. offering up only those engagement opportunities most likely to resonate with them via various forms of filtering and content curation.
2. **The core value proposition for participating organizations** will be expanding the number of citizens who are exposed to their mission, engagement opportunities and tools. Integrating our launch with the America Talks/National Week of Conversation will ensure that citizens will be “primed” for participation and deep engagement. There is a technological infrastructure component to this that will also be extremely valuable, e.g. streamlining the upload of information and events by individual organizations into a standardized environment. Among other things, this will allow us to offer a comprehensive interpersonal bridging calendar reflecting all events in this space. Over time we will also be able to share citizen engagement best practices with our member organizations to help them build a bigger and more deeply committed community of supporters.

Where Are We Right Now?

1. The back end system was launched on April 22nd. This allows Citizen Connect member organizations to populate their profiles and events data. Currently more than 300 Listen First Coalition members are in the process of completing their data entry in support of the American Talks/National Week of Conversation event that kicks off on June 12th.
2. The front end of Citizen Connect is well on the way to being completed and will become available for view on May 10th. We are also working on a “widget” that will permit a subset of featured events to be shown on the America Talks website.
3. An operations team is in place to support ongoing portal services. This team resides at the Bridge Alliance who has stepped up to host and sponsor Citizen Connect.

4. We've already begun planning for the next phases of the portal's evolution. This includes exploring exciting collaboration opportunities with many leaders in this field.

Future Phases Under Development

1. After the National Week of Conversation wraps up on June 20th, we will be in a position to add organizations from other civic reform sectors, e.g. election reform and civic education. We plan to have all Bridge Alliance members who work in these sectors on the Citizen Connect platform by the end of June.
2. Once the portal reflects the full range of civic engagement opportunities, we will begin a more aggressive marketing effort. We are working with Nevins and Associates to develop a powerful messaging, outreach and social media program to build our audience. We are exploring a formal launch that would coincide with the July 4th holiday.
3. During this timeframe we will also enhance system resilience by backing up the database on the cloud (via Firestore), developing scalable event syndication capabilities and make other technical refinements.
4. The next full release is planned for no later than September 1st. This release will focus on harnessing the news cycle to expose more citizens to our community's vital work. One component of this will be embedding news and information about the civic reform movement and our members on the Citizen Connect platform itself. The second component will involve integrating our event and engagement data into third party news related sites. Our initial partner here will be AllSides – a major news aggregator and education platform that has a very large and rapidly growing audience. We are currently in the planning stages with them and are extremely excited about the potential for this strategic partnership. We will also explore including The Fulcrum into this release. They have recently become the news division of the Bridge Alliance. Having both a news aggregator and an organization focused primarily on content creation in this phase would be powerful. We see this release of Citizen Connect having significant impact in its own right and also serving as a model for future major media relationships.

Longer Term Vision:

1. Embed our community's civic engagement opportunities cross the media ecosystem, e.g. so that all content related to political reform and healing divisions has a link to Citizen Connect to facilitate citizens acting immediately on what they have just read or viewed.
2. Bringing the entire community under one roof creates unprecedented data analysis opportunities. This will result in insights into citizen engagement best practices that will fuel audience development at scale. We are pursuing partnerships with world class data analytics players to realize this opportunity.
3. Having so many organizations and their citizen engagement opportunities in one place will also facilitate coordination and collaboration between individual organizations and with larger scale programs. We have a remarkable community that has much to learn from each other and much they can achieve by working together. We also need to avoid reinventing the wheel regarding infrastructure, data and programs.
4. In addition to connecting our community with mainstream citizens more efficiently and effectively, we see Citizen Connect making it much easier for the media and funders to locate, learn about and build relationships with organizations in this space.