

**MEETING
NOTES**
Of July 9, 2008

Northeast Ohio Citizens League



NEOCL Contact Information:
Michael Gesing (216) 695-3191
mike@neohio.org

Special Interest Articles:

- A New Voice for Citizens
- Introductions and purpose
- What is your dream of a Citizens League?
- Who is missing? What are the goals for inclusion?
- What needs to happen next?
- What will you take away from this meeting?
- Some next steps

Northeast Ohio is a region made up of 16 counties, 857 governing units - including counties, cities, townships, villages, libraries, parks and special districts - 4.3 million citizens and has an economy of \$170 billion.

A New Voice for Citizens

The first meeting of the Northeast Ohio (NEOCL) Citizens League was held on July 9, 2008 at the Independence Community Center; many thanks to Ron White for hosting this event and quite apropos that we launch from Independence, Ohio.

The meeting was a structured open forum with vision and task related questions facilitated by Jack Ricchiuto. Lasting from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m., the gathering was attended by

a diverse group of citizens, with a shared passion, who offered ideas, feedback and guidance.

Comprised of folks of different walks of life, age, and experience - the group fostered some great experiences, with hope and creative thinking being some of the most apparent. Our youngest participant was fourteen (14) and our oldest was very wise.

Meeting Format: Following introductions and review of purpose, the meeting opened up into several

presented questions:

- What is your dream of a Citizens League? What would you like to hear people say ten (10) years from now?
- Who is missing? What are the goals for inclusion?
- What needs to happen next?
- What will you take away from this meeting?

Introductions and Purpose

"Why a Northeast Ohio Citizens League?" ...

Mike Gesing and Georgia Reash, meeting managers, first provided reflection on this question. According to Mike, the NEOCL voice builds off the progress already underway that is shaping the 'regional landscape'.

Through the results of *Voices & Choices, The Fund for Our Economic Future and Advance Northeast Ohio* - a deeper thirst for community partnership and citizen

engagement has been created, opening the opportunity for the shaping of a new story.

While its vision is in formation state, ultimately, NEOCL aims to return the voice of the citizen to the decision-making process and help build a new regional governance structure for NEOhio.

Georgia offered up a deeper perspective into the long term function of NEOCL, with five (5) essential pillars of service being developed:



- ✓ citizen engagement and education
- ✓ information collection
- ✓ information dissemination
- ✓ demonstration projects
- ✓ policy influence

Over the past several months, League champions have studied models of citizen advocacy, including the Minnesota Citizen League. Through this supporting research, and the complimentary voice of experts, a fresh vision of citizen engagement and education can be explored.

“What is YOUR DREAM of a Citizens League; what would you like to hear people say ten (10) years from now?”



The Dreaming Space

<i>I would like the Northeast Ohio Citizens League to..</i>	People who go change things	Sparks revolution
Be advocates with local governments with regional interest	A world connection	Works together
Takes people seriously, let people be heard by decision makers	Consistent community voice	Gets back to the value of the citizen
Actually accomplish something; doers show up	Hope not apathy	Helps government report out, “our community thrives”
A place where talk is valued	A source of recognition	Is visible and sustainable
Ignite, reform, engage	A place where people want to be	NOT value neutral
CREATE doers	Influence policy	Authentic
Do their homework	Influence decision makers	Offers valuable information
Widely engaging	Ensure decision makers are really listening	Changes governance
Takes the ‘whole’ into consideration	Really demonstrate success in 1-2 focus areas to start off	To be known...”and that was made possible through the NEOCL...”
Be non-partisan	Create power and have power	Uses data and good governance principles in decision making

Who is Missing?

“Who is missing? What are our goals for inclusion?”

<i>To be successful in the long term, we must include....</i>	Faith leaders	Political leaders (both parties)
Younger people	Townships and villages	Ohio Township Association
National Civic League	The disadvantaged, disabled, displaced	Ex-Offenders
Business, nonprofits, education, government	Artists	People transitioning from welfare
Labor	Libraries	Media
Minority groups	Local government	Funders, private social venture investors
Different economic levels	Policy makers	The next President
Past organizational leaders	Economic development	Stay at home moms
People not from Cleveland	Legal system	Levin School
Mayors and managers	NE Ohio City Council Association	CQTAR
NOACCA	Ohio Commissioners	Other National Leadership organizations
	Education representatives	
	Reps from the state	
	Big names; Drew Carey	

What Needs to Happen Next? – our group discussion notes

<i>Next important organizational steps....</i>	Knows what it will be committed to	Write a basic position and case statement
Mission, principles, values	Communication system	Begin to cultivate board members
Scope of Purpose (advocate, push, etc..?)	Determine geographic footprint	Always ask, “who is missing”?
Vision	Always ask: what are we learning?	Learn from mistakes; lessons learned from the past
Organization (governance, chapters, staffing)	Find the money	Determine what makes it unique
Examine past models	Identify 2 key focus areas to launch in September	Determine what it means by policy influence, data gathering, information dissemination, projects
Legal determination	Determine if it will take position on issues, candidates, etc...	Get presence; get the web site up and running
Create a sustainability plan	Determine how we will educate and engage the public	Be patient and purposeful at the same time
Decision making process	Create a key partner / stakeholder plan	
Determine: sustaining or self interest		
Create accountability structure		



“The job of the citizen is to keep his mouth open.”

Gunter Grass, German poet, novelist, playwright, sculptor, printmaker, 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature.

What Will you Take Away from This?

<i>Some things I take away from this meeting...</i>	Some honest dialogue
We are all different and that is a good thing	Appreciation for past efforts
I take away a sense of being impressed with how kind we are to each other	The essential need for connection to regional issues; must work together
A sense of not being so alone	New friends and contacts
Urgency	Appreciation for those who are really trying to transform things
Anxiety	The realization that we have to work much harder at coordinating regionalism with many partners
Hopefulness	
Enthusiasm	
That a young person's voice does matter	

Some Things We've Been Working On...

Good Listening
Thoughtful Planning
A Solid Case Statement
Logo and Web Site
Some First Key Topics of Focus
Next Step Organizational Priorities
Fiscal Agent Sponsorship
Cultivating Individual Donors to Get Things Going for a While
Meetings That Matter
Office Space (Cleveland, Akron & Youngstown)

If you want to help with some 'behind the scene' volunteer work - Let us know! Let us know!

Summer Reading – Preparing for Fall

By Michael P. Gesing

Our next meetings in August will be regional - one in the Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown areas.

We will be talking about our values, principles, and get to some work around starting projects involving civic engagement and education.

Who in the Akron and Youngstown area do you think would like to get involved?

Please forward them our basic contact information & email us as well! Thanks.

Being involved in starting something called the *Northeast Ohio Citizens League* tends to put you in a frame of mind to read inspirational materials – things that you can apply to the situation and that help in the building process.

Here are a few things to get the creative juices flowing:

[A Brilliant Solution](#) – **Inventing the American Constitution**

A very accessible read on just what went on during the summer of 1787 when a very strange group of people came together to write our Constitution. And all we've got to worry about is one corner of one state! Couldn't wait for

Amazon so I went to a local bookstore. Thanks to Ed Morrison for the initial recommendation!

[Rebooting America](#)

This is "an anthology of forty-four essays brimming with the hopes of reenergizing, reorganizing, and reorienting our government for the Internet Age." Just an outstanding group of ideas that start you to thinking "what if we did that around here?" Free PDF download too. It's presented by the [Personal Democracy Forum](#) which has been exploring this topic for years. E-government for NEOhio: another one of our

challenges. And what are YOU reading these days that may be applicable to our mission?

Send us your titles and we'll start to compile a recommended reading list.

Also check out The [Citizens League](#) of Minneapolis –St.Paul which has been going since 1952 & is responsible for the Met Council & a tax revenue sharing proposal which our own NEOhio Mayors Association is trying to [emulate](#).

Citizen Disconnect: A Big Concern

By Georgia Reash

Systemically, Americans have become steadily more disconnected from one another and from their community institutions over the last 30 years, resulting in a decline of relationships as well a loss in our nation's "social capital", the networks that bring value to community.

In his book, "[Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community](#)", Robert Putnam described how various forms of connectedness, from school participation to extended family, have declined since their peak in the 1960s. Added research suggests that community problems ranging from health, crime, drug abuse,

education, poverty, and effective government are made better or worse depending on how engaged citizens are. Putman points out that, in communities where people are [in relationship](#) with each other, where they [know](#) one another's stories, concerns, hopes and gifts and where they [trust and depend](#) upon one another - those communities have a higher quality of life.

If civic engagement is so important, why aren't people doing something about it? Is it true that we are just apathetic, have given up, are too busy, and too overworked?

NEOCL would beg to differ. Where others see

apathy, we see opportunity for real solutions. Based on the findings of the Kettering Foundation (Citizens and Politics), NEOCL believes citizens are not apathetic or isolated, powerless or impotent. Rather, our view of citizenry is one that holds citizens, and citizen supporting organizations, as the **core** to revitalization.

The real problem may be that we have, in fact, lost the experience and memory for democratic tradition, which can and does work.

Our job, therefore, seems clear.....listen, teach, and empower connectedness. In this space, our very own citizens will pave the way back home.

The Northeast Ohio Citizens League

PHONE:

MIKE GESING
(216) 695-3191

GEORGIA REASH
(440) 263-3923

E-MAIL:
mike@neohio.org

www.neohio.org