

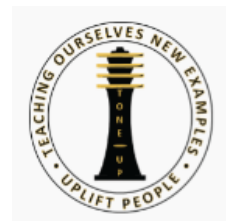
From the Block to the Ballot 2.0

Focusing Locally and Piloting a Relational Approach



Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The United States systematically keeps people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system out of the democratic process by restricting the voting rights of millions of formerly disenfranchised people. At the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC), we view restoring voting rights for Minnesotans serving felony probation as one way to transform our criminal legal system. In March 2023, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz signed a bill into law that restored voting rights to around 47,000 Minnesotans who were disenfranchised at that time because they were serving felony probation or supervised release.

In the report that follows, we present findings from a 2023 voter mobilization effort - B2B 2.0 - focused directly on connecting with formerly-disenfranchised, Black, Twin Cities residents following the restoration of voting rights in Minnesota. We show the promising results - **residents were nearly twice as likely to vote if they had a phone conversation with the outreach team** - and highlight the power of a relational power-building strategy, lessons on docu-

mentation and training, and the importance of credible messengers in this space using unique tools and a targeted list.

Background. In partnership with community-based organizations T.O.N.E. U.P. and WILD, and building off efforts from our [pilot in 2022](#), we embarked on a second “From the Block to the Ballot” pilot (B2B 2.0), this time scoping in smaller to mobilize formerly disenfranchised Black residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul to vote in the fall 2023 local elections. The purpose was to document and explore the re-focused effort to mobilize these voters through phone banking and door-knocking using a different list and set of tools, and to gain early insights into T.O.N.E. U.P.’s relational power-building strategy.

Our primary goals were to: 1) document what the B2B 2.0 pilot effort looked and felt like from a process standpoint, 2) explore the key characteristics of the B2B 2.0 pilot effort, and 3) determine the impact of the B2B 2.0 pilot effort on voting likelihood. Our team conducted ethnographic participant observations, interviews, and analyses of voter data to address these goals.

Findings. This pilot provided insights into the real power of a relational power-building process and the need for additional in-depth documentation of the process. We learned robust training for new volunteers that includes information on the target population and opportunities to practice outreach conversations was necessary. Nearly every phone bank participant reported their experiences were overall positive and they were motivated by connecting with potential voters. However, experience matters when conducting phone banks, as we found that newer participants felt underprepared due to both minimal practice and scripts. Participants reported experiencing more relational engagement with community members while door-knocking compared to on the phones. On the doors, empathy for the vulnerability,

fear, and trauma potentially held by formerly disenfranchised people was crucial to this project's success. Continual tweaks in outreach tools were also critical to success. Considering these findings, we recommend robust training and practice for new volunteers engaging in relational power building and voter outreach. We also recommend using a relational approach with volunteers to build persistence and motivation when unavoidable frustrations with outreach arise (e.g. unanswered calls).

The pilot also showed several key characteristics of the B2B 2.0 approach: the use of **credible messengers**, a **targeted list**, and the **relational approach** mentioned above. Credible messengers often have a direct connection to the target community by being themselves formerly disenfranchised; sharing this connection can lead to a deeper sense of empathy and drive in outreach. B2B 2.0 was the first to create a targeted list of Black, formerly disenfranchised, Minneapolis and St. Paul residents. In combination with an app like OurVoice, this targeted approach opens the door to better mobilize this voter bloc. Lastly, prioritizing a relational approach with potential voters goes beyond simply notifying them of their right to vote. It builds trust and connects individuals to needed resources. Therefore, we recommend using credible messengers and a personalizable app like OurVoice to create opportunities for more meaningful and intentional connections during outreach.

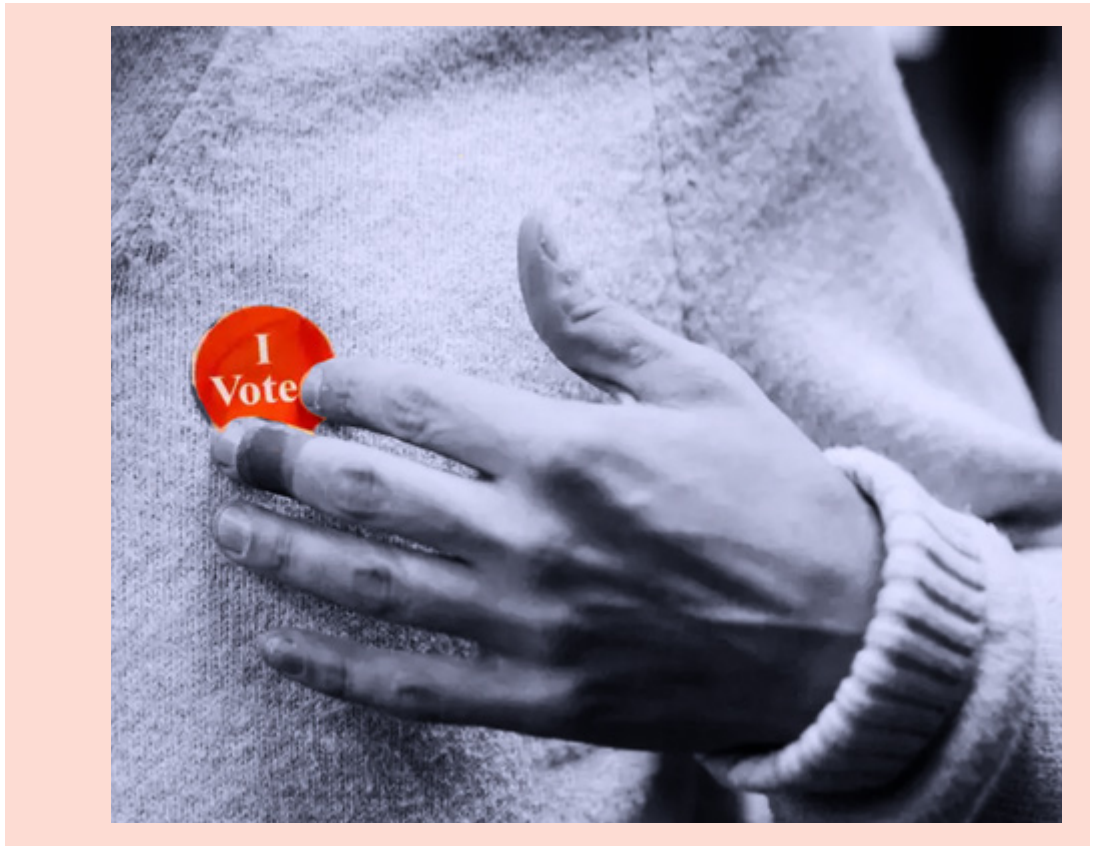
Finally, this outreach effort's impact on increasing voter turnout among formerly disenfranchised Black individuals in Minneapolis and Saint Paul showed very promising results. Quantitative analyses found a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of voting when someone was reached via phone during the B2B 2.0 pilot, despite the small sample size and minor election. Analyses showed that 2.6% of the control group voted, compared to 4.8% of those who were called and contacted (that is, at least a brief conversation was had with the voter). This

difference is statistically significant ($p=0.03$).

T.O.N.E. U.P., WILD, and MNJRC built up infrastructure for the B2B 2.0 pilot, based on insights from the 2022 pilot, to intentionally and relationally reach formerly disenfranchised Black voters in Minneapolis and St. Paul ahead of the 2023 local elections. The use of credible messengers combined with the OurVoice app made 2023's phone banking much more efficient and impactful and truly moved residents from the block to the ballot. Restoring voting rights and subsequently acting on those rights is critical to building a more just democracy in the United States, yet many formerly disenfranchised individuals continue to abstain from voting for a myriad of reasons. Prioritizing relational outreach is critical to reaching formerly disenfranchised voters and supporting their diverse voting experiences.

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Introduction

One of the many benefits of a democratic system is that a democracy can advance changes to government institutions charged with administering justice. For example, in the U.S., we elect judges. These changes are also often driven by statewide legislation. Policymakers hold significant power in designing our systems of justice. However, the policymaking process often happens without considering many types of data and perspectives.

Specifically, the United States systematically keeps out people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system. While many countries around the world ban people with criminal legal involvement from casting a ballot, the U.S. stands alone in restricting the voting rights of millions of formerly disenfranchised people (Inderbitzin, 2019).

At the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC), we are working to transform the criminal legal system. We envision a criminal legal system that promotes public safety by being more fair, equitable, accountable, and restorative in delivering justice. As a result, we view expanding democracy as a critical step in transforming the criminal legal system.

This report focuses on an effort to do just that through the restoration of voting rights for Minnesotans serving felony probation. Additionally, it delves into a collaborative effort we call "From the Block to the Ballot" (or "B2B" for short) to connect with, educate, and support formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans to exercise their rights.

We view expanding democracy as a critical step in transforming the criminal legal system.

Background

“From the Block to the Ballot” (B2B) began in the fall of 2022. The MNJRC spearheaded an exploration into effective strategies for contacting and mobilizing formerly disenfranchised voters through a small-scale phone bank pilot.

In 2022, an estimated 85,600 Minnesotans had been disenfranchised at some point since 2004 by the state of Minnesota due to their past felony conviction. These laws restricted Minnesotans from voting for elected officials in charge of governing the systems responsible for serving the community, including the criminal legal system. For some people, these restrictions lasted decades as Minnesota has historically long probation sentences.

By 2022, we estimated that most of these people should have had their rights restored after serving their probation, but may not have known it. This number helped us get a universe for individuals to contact to support them in exercising their rights.

The 2022 pilot lasted four weeks and was a collaboration between the Twin Cities Diversity in Practice’s “Wanton Injustice Legal Detail” (or WILD), a platform that provides connections between legal workers and community organizations in combating anti-black issues, and T.O.N.E. U.P., a non-profit organization that provides re-entry services to formerly disenfranchised individuals.

The project included a treatment group consisting of 12,759 people - 9,440 were to be contacted by phone and 3,319 by text. Despite challenges in identifying this population, mostly due to the quality of our contact list, our small-scale pilot demonstrated the potential to successfully engage and mobilize this population. This was evidenced by a slight increase in 2022 voter turnout among those reached with certainty via phone call (13%) and those contacted with a phone call followed by a text reminder (14%), compared to a control group (12%). (Read our [full report on our 2022 effort here](#).)

While these increases were small, they existed in a pilot campaign with limited resources, a limited list, a difficult platform, and a handful of organizations and volunteers testing out new ideas. The 2022 campaign also took place under the old law that disenfranchised tens of thousands of Minnesotans.

In March 2023, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz signed a bill into law that restored voting rights to around 47,000 Minnesotans who were disenfranchised at that time because they were serving felony probation or supervised release.¹ As part of a yearslong effort, several legislative leaders worked with community members and a coalition of advocates including the MNJRC.

Following the passage of this bill, the MNJRC began working with our partners to launch what we called “From the Block to the Ballot 2.0” (B2B 2.0) to learn how to move beyond the ability to identify newly eligible voters to actually explore developing a platform that could house the

¹ Policymakers and advocates often cite 55,000 as the number of people whose rights were restored after the 2023 bill but careful estimates showed about 8,000-9,000 of those 55,000 are still in prison or jail for felonies and don’t yet have their rights restored.

While these increases were small, they existed in a pilot campaign with limited resources, a limited list, a difficult platform, and a handful of organizations and volunteers testing out new ideas.

campaign. Our partners at WILD and T.O.N.E. U.P. led volunteer recruitment and canvassing (this time, phone banking, door-knocking, and site canvassing) while the MNJRC documented the process for this report. The Florida Voting Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRRC), which has led successful campaigns to restore voting rights for thousands of Floridians, supported us by providing technical assistance to develop the tools necessary to improve the process.

During our pilot in 2022, we learned several important lessons. First, we needed to focus on the quality of the list used to identify potential voters with criminal histories - a list we created linking administrative data with consumer data. We wanted to ensure both that we collected the most accurate data *and* that that data would be securely stored with T.O.N.E. U.P. - an organization led by formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans that centers their needs - acting as the primary owner. We also learned that the system we were using to contact the list (CallHub, a commonly used platform for phone banks by other campaigns) needed to be user and mobile-friendly.

Second, we learned the importance of rigorous but adaptive documentation. In working with T.O.N.E. U.P. to set up a canvas unique to the population of formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans, the research component felt intrusive at times, and, with limited resources to actually do the canvassing, documentation was often an added lift.

Finally, one of the most challenging lessons was the importance of starting small. Seeing a new constituency included in the democratic process in 2023 was exciting. The temptation to assume that we could immediately and effectively mobilize tens of thousands of new voters on a small budget with a handful of organizations focused on the B2B strategy was significant. We knew we needed to invest both time and money to train volunteers or paid staff, identify folks with system involvement and a desire to get engaged civically, and provide volunteers or paid staff with enough time and resources to make successful contact.

With these lessons in hand, our 2023 B2B 2.0 launched with our same partners - T.O.N.E. U.P. and WILD - as we set out in an effort to stay small and identify the best tools and lists.

We were also fortunate to partner with the Minnesota Timberwolves to raise public awareness of this important issue. For example, Timberwolves player Karl-Anthony Towns participated in a panel discussion alongside Senator Bobby Champion, Minnesota's first Black Senator, Zeke Caliguri, an activist and Panamerica Prize winner, and Jasmin Kitto, a Black-Indigenous woman working for the New Justice Project MN. The panel discussed the importance of informing individuals about their voting rights, available resources, and recent legislative changes.

As a result of this and other activities in partnership with the B2B team, Timberwolves player Karl-Anthony Towns and the team received numerous recognitions including the prestigious Kareem Abdul Jabarr social justice award from the National Basketball Association for supporting the passage of the bill and the B2B 2.0 effort which helped and continues to help elevate this critical work.

From the Block to the Ballot 2.0 (B2B 2.0) brought together T.O.N.E. U.P., WILD, and MNJRC to focus our mobilization efforts on formerly disenfranchised Black residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the 2023 local elections.

From the Block to the Ballot 2.0

From the Block to the Ballot 2.0 (B2B 2.0) brought together [T.O.N.E. U.P.](#), [WILD](#), and MNJRC to focus our mobilization efforts on formerly disenfranchised Black residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the 2023 local elections. We employed this strategy for several reasons. First, as race heavily predicts geography in Minnesota, this was one way to focus on the most disproportionately impacted group in the Twin Cities relative to the population of the state.

In addition, the outreach efforts were led by T.O.N.E. U.P., a Black and Brown-centered organization. As T.O.N.E. U.P. leadership explains,

We are deeply in tune with the history of this country and the pervasive racism that continues to manifest in various forms of oppression and state-sanctioned violence. Whether through policing, over-sentencing, or the dismal state of reentry, Black people suffer the most. Our focus on Black justice-impacted eligible voters stems from a profound understanding of the unique challenges and systemic injustices they face. For nearly four years, we have worked tirelessly across the Twin Cities to provide essential support and resources for those re-entering society after incarceration. Our commitment to voter engagement among this community is rooted in the belief that true democracy must include the voices of those most affected by the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, WILD oversaw volunteer recruitment and coordination. WILD's vision is to create Twin Cities communities free of anti-Black racism and all forms of racism by organizing and employing the collective legal power of TCDIP Members.

To reach this group, we created a targeted list and incorporated the list into an application that our partners at the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRRC) helped us develop called "Our-Voice." This app replaced CallHub, which we used in 2022, and supported both the canvassing and phone banking efforts. With the app, T.O.N.E. U.P. was able to map out efficient routes for door-knocking, have phone bankers make calls directly from the app, and take all notes from canvassing and phone banking within the app from a smartphone.

While B2B 2.0 was another small-scale pilot, our mobilization approaches expanded. T.O.N.E. U.P. led the outreach through a combination of phone banking, door-knocking, and site canvassing. This distinguishes the pilot from other initiatives. Despite experts advocating for methods like phone banking, direct mail, email, texting, and mass media due to their speed and lower investment requirements compared to door-knocking (Green, 2019), this pilot prioritized the personal connection and local engagement that door-knocking offers.

As the T.O.N.E. U.P. team explains, their non-partisan, get-out-the vote initiative “centered empathy and prioritized safety and privacy.” In their field report, they describe the critical understanding that it takes courage and strength to re-engage with the political process after being removed from it and, perhaps most importantly, formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans have significant barriers and needs that are of primary importance. As a result, the script they used did not lead with a political check-in or ask. As they explain,

Every person we engaged on the streets, at their doors, or on the phones we first let them know about the services we provide and asked them if they needed any of those resources. We then let them know about the new law and encouraged them to use their vote. Our approach ensures that the newly re-enfranchised population feels valued, heard, and empowered in their journey towards civic engagement. From the Block to the Ballot works to strengthen our democracy, make it more relational with its people and to create a more inclusive just society for all.

Research shows that formerly disenfranchised leaders can serve as organizational catalysts due to their knowledge, influence, and credibility among those who are or were in the same position (Sturm, 2017). Their past experience equips them to speak the language of the community, facilitating our targeted outreach efforts.

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of the research component of B2B 2.0 was to document and explore the re-focused effort to mobilize voters locally. Specifically, our research set to answer the following questions:

1. What did the B2B 2.0 pilot effort **look and feel like** from a process standpoint?
2. What were the **unique/key characteristics** of the B2B 2.0 pilot effort?
3. What was the impact of the B2B 2.0 pilot effort on **voting likelihood**?

By addressing these questions, we can gain insight into how T.O.N.E. U.P.’s approach offers a promising relational power-building strategy that can truly make a difference in the disenfranchised community, particularly among Black individuals who are disproportionately disenfranchised in the Twin Cities metro.

The first question in our research efforts involved an exploration of what B2B 2.0 pilot *looked* and *felt like* for participants. To accomplish this, we undertook a number of different strategies for data collection. We were interested in whether T.O.N.E. U.P.’s approach resonated not only with the targeted disenfranchised folks in mobilization efforts, but with volunteers that are civically engaged or that are actively looking to engage in activities like this one to contribute to positive social change in their community.

◆ Observations

In order to understand the process, two members of our team conducted what is known as ethnographic participant observation. The ethnographic aspect of this research method implies that it is focused on studying people in their environment - meeting them where they are and joining them “on the ground” to understand the process more intimately and authentically. Our research team was involved in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the group of people being studied (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Our team actively participated in B2B 2.0 by attending training sessions, engaging in door-knocking, site canvassing, and phone banking activities, and meticulously documenting our observations. At least one of our team members was present for five of the many door-knocking and site canvassing sessions, and for all of the five phone banking sessions.

Being present as part of the outreach was important to capture the day-to-day evolution of the work and to take detailed notes. This also aided our research, as the people we observed did not feel inhibited by our presence. We were trained under T.O.N.E. U.P. using their methodology to better assess the effectiveness and impact of their approach.

◆ Documents

We also collected copies of T.O.N.E. U.P. training materials and resources to fully understand B2B 2.0 training in particular. These documents included training materials for canvassing and phone banking, coaching materials to support people reentering the community from prison, and reports created throughout the process.

◆ Interviews

Unlike the previous two research methods, which primarily involved analyzing T.O.N.E. U.P.'s outreach efforts, the interviews were focused on the individuals directly involved in reaching out to the community. This approach aimed to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives, providing us with firsthand information on what aspects they considered effective, and what areas they believed needed improvement.

We interviewed eight members of T.O.N.E. U.P.'s staff, six adult volunteers, and four youth volunteers. We began interviews with get-to-know-you questions and then dove into their feedback on the training they received, what the interactions with voters felt like, and big takeaways. Interviews were important so that we could learn from volunteers and T.O.N.E. U.P. staff themselves how the process felt.

◆ Quantitative Data

Finally, the T.O.N.E. U.P. team tracked and coded calls, knocks, conversations, and follow-ups in real-time via OurVoice. After the election, the list was matched to the updated voter file from the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office which lists who voted in the 2023 municipal elections. These data were cleaned and analyzed to estimate the effect of contact on turnout.

◆ Limitations

Limitations are a natural aspect of research. First, we received the targeted list in the OurVoice app from our partners at FRRC very close to election day - which presented a significant limitation with timing. We had to wait until the app was fully developed (as it was designed to be unique and personalized to the T.O.N.E. U.P. team), the targeted list was incorporated, and the app was tested to eliminate bugs. As a result, the app was not fully functional until well into outreach efforts. The targeted list was received by October 18th and the OurVoice app was developed by October 19th. The November 2023 elections took place only 19 days after we had everything ready to start our efforts.

Additionally, the November 2023 local elections were very small and limited (a single school board election in Saint Paul and a city council election in Minneapolis) and, as a result, not highly anticipated by the majority of Twin Cities residents, including many of our very civically engaged volunteers. This was a significant limitation with voter participation.

Finally, some volunteers encountered some language barriers during the canvassing process. Languages such as Spanish and Somali were present during the door-knocking stage, and T.O.N.E. U.P. only had one interpreter for each of these languages.

STAFF AND PROCESS

T.O.N.E. U.P. is a non-profit organization that provides re-entry services to formerly disenfranchised individuals. Their team led the B2B 2.0 outreach efforts to mobilize formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans both in 2022 and 2023. Their mission is to help people looking for a second chance to succeed, centering love, accountability, and responsibility across their work.

The majority (six of the main team of nine) of the T.O.N.E. U.P. team are Black men between 30-50 years, with two Latina women in their 20s and one white woman in her 30s. Critically, most T.O.N.E. U.P. staff are formerly disenfranchised, including the founder. Many staff are relatives to one another. This demographic make-up also played into the decision to narrow the outreach focus and list to Black Minneapolis and Saint Paul residents in particular.

TRAINING AND PREPARATION PROCESS

T.O.N.E. U.P.'s training approach is an organic process and staff adapt the training based on the team's needs or the presence of new volunteers. Understanding the experience of participants in these training sessions is crucial for ongoing improvements. This organic flow of training was consistent across all outreach activities. Even though the phone banking training had a more standardized structure, it remained iterative in nature. This was both essential to the process and made it challenging to document and scale.

For the door-knocking and site canvassing training, the team began by watching a [music video about voting](#), doing an ice breaker by commenting what they learned from the lyrics, and then pivoted to conducting a training including how to approach doors (e.g. body language), re-entry status file creation for those returning to the community, and a basic overview of the new Restore the Vote law. They then took time for "rap practice" - reviewing the script and talking points. After their time out in the streets and on the doors, the team circled up to discuss their highs and lows of the day.

The phone bank training happened at the beginning of every phone banking session with staff and volunteers doing introductions, then staff giving a powerpoint presentation explaining how the OurVoice app worked, an overview of T.O.N.E. U.P., an overview of OurVoice, and an example call flow. Volunteers had a sheet with talking points to use on the phone but not a rigid script. Phone banks wrapped up with a debrief.

◆ List

We created our targeted list by first considering all individuals listed in the Minnesota Department of Corrections database. We cast a wider net than specifically targeting the newly re-enfranchised individuals and focused on anyone with a conviction in Minnesota. We then filtered for those currently serving their probation sentence and narrowed our outreach to focus on formerly disenfranchised Black folks specifically. This gave us an initial list of 21,824 people.

We then removed people marked deceased, without contact information, whose most recent address is outside of Minnesota, and, finally, those who live outside of Minneapolis and Saint

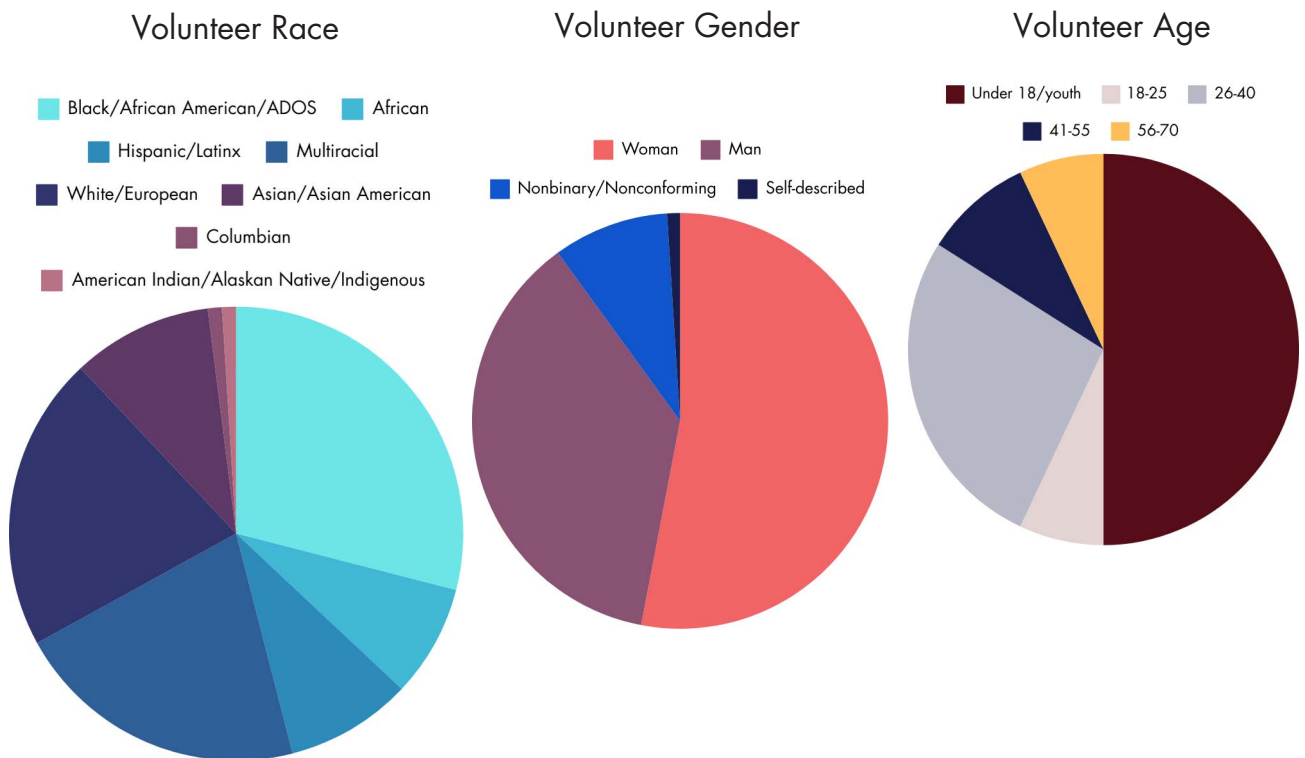
Paul. Our final sample population was 6,599 unique doors and 7,929 unique phone numbers after additional filtering (e.g. undeliverable addresses).

PHONE BANKING PROCESS

Phone banking began at the end of October and shifts occurred through election day. Over the course of five sessions, a total of 70 volunteers and staff signed up and 60 people showed up to make calls - including both paid staff and volunteers. WILD’s volunteer recruitment strategy consisted of:

- Regular messaging via newsletter and social media channels to a network of 75 law firms and corporate legal departments
- Regular communication to affinity bar associations
- Staffing tables at legal related events
- Staffing tables at law school forums
- Staffing tables at community events
- Connecting with community-based organizations’ student-based programs

A significant number of the phone bank volunteers were young people; around half (35) of the phone bankers were under 18 years old. The volunteers were racially and gender diverse and came from a large mix of backgrounds including legal system actors, concerned advocates, students, and direct service providers.



As mentioned above, the OurVoice app worked best **without** a computer so we were able to make it a lot more accessible to folks wanting to volunteer. The new software also allowed us to have a unique phone number attached to it which showed up as “T.O.N.E. U.P.” and not spam. OurVoice made phone banking this year much more efficient and impactful for the B2B 2.0 program.

OUT IN THE STREETS: DOOR-KNOCKING AND SITE CANVASSING

The outreach efforts began with canvassing on the doors and at different sites, which started the first week in October. Typically, four team members from T.O.N.E. U.P. would go out in pairs for a shift. The team initially focused on ‘site canvassing,’ going to a heavily trafficked location and speaking to people (e.g. the Midtown Global Market in South Minneapolis) and non-targeted door-knocking in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood in South Minneapolis. Before a list was finalized and the tools were developed, site canvassing allowed the team to talk to more people with a less targeted approach. Prior to using the OurVoice app, which gave the T.O.N.E. U.P. team a discrete list of doors, the canvassers “cut turf” - that is, identified their routes and doors - using Google maps.

Door-knocking with the more targeted list began the week of October 23rd, two weeks before the election on November 7th, as soon as the OurVoice app was designed and ready for use. With this new targeted list, two teams of two to three people split up and drove to a list of ~40 addresses total. This allowed the team to knock a larger number of doors each day.

Findings

TRAINING FINDINGS

A majority of interviewee reflections were positive about their B2B 2.0 training overall and commented specifically that training aided in feeling prepared for the work. While there were a few criticisms, there was a larger pattern of people indicating that their experience was good while offering suggestions for improvement.

From those who provided more than vague, positive feedback (e.g. “I think it was perfect,” “they did a good job”), many focused on feeling supported by the team and feeling that the training was accessible. Participants reported that they found the script and practice to be some of the most helpful aspects of the training. Suggestions for improvement included a desire for more time to practice, more information about the target population, and preparation for the questions they might encounter. **Overall, much of the constructive feedback on the trainings centered around a desire for more structure and opportunities to practice.**

PHONE BANKING FINDINGS

In phone banking, we found that experience matters, volunteers were persistent, and the connections that were made felt motivating and were supported by the process. During the phone banking process in particular, the research team observed a number of different experiences, often delineated by whether or not the individual staff or volunteer had any past experience making calls. Both experienced and first-time participants described frustration with the phone banking process, citing occasional issues with app functionality

and overall less engagement than they had envisioned. Those with no prior experience phone banking reported feeling frustrated with the call rate and hangups.

We observed some more experienced folks flying through the call list, unbothered by the hard calls and hangups. This was also reflected in our interviews, with one person saying:

“I think coming with a background of canvassing prior, some days will be rough. Some days you might not talk to a single person on your list. Other days you might talk to five or even just one.”

People with past experience also reported more comfort and more excitement with the pickups and response rate, with one volunteer exclaiming, “I made 20 calls and got 10 pickups, that’s unheard of!” Those with past experience also reported the technology to be innovative and streamlined.

We also found volunteers - and in particular volunteers who had no experience with the criminal legal system - expressed a lot of anxiety and uncertainty during the introduction and training process as compared to staff. For example, during the training, the staff modeled a call for participants to demonstrate in real-time how a call might unfold. During one phone bank session, a volunteer watched the model call unfold and exclaimed afterward, “Hey if that happens, I’ll have no idea what to do... we need to clone you!” This example represents a consistent sentiment from volunteers: an uncertainty about whether they were the “right ones” to be making these calls. Notably, one person did reflect on whether having lived experience is a vital aspect of doing this work:

“I did feel a little bit like, wouldn’t it be best to have all former felons make the calls...?”

Because the phone banking was designed to connect Minneapolis residents who have criminal backgrounds to resources and support from T.O.N.E. U.P. as the **primary** goal, and to share voting education as the **secondary** goal, a rigid script (like ones used in many get-out-the-vote efforts) didn’t fit as well. As a result, volunteers were expected to think on the fly and respond to need with compassion and understanding for someone navigating life in re-entry. Some volunteers rose to the challenge, others didn’t.

Despite challenges and frustrations, first-timers described their joy and gratitude for the limited positive interactions after the phone bank calls were over. Nearly every participant described their overall experience as positive. A number of interviewees even relayed negative experiences where they still had valuable takeaways. For example, one volunteer said:

“It was when...my friends who had callers who were really like aggressive and mean and not friendly at all. And...I first was thinking why would someone be mean to someone who’s trying to help them and provide them information? But then I was realizing like, hey, these people might not like anyone who tries to involve them with the government or legal system at all. Like, they might feel threatened by that because...a lot of people with a criminal background are often like minorities that were unfairly targeted by people who wanted them to be in jail...And why would you wanna involve yourself with that? And then I was like kind of understanding...maybe they just don’t wanna even think about that.”

Newcomers and experienced folks alike had good and bad interactions, but nothing stopped them from continuing with their work. Despite some frustration and discomfort, the few good interactions were enough to keep volunteers and staff going.

While there were more frustrations and anxieties tied to phone banking, particularly for newco-

mers, our data demonstrates that people still felt motivated by their experiences, especially when connecting with potential voters. These data are important because, in the broader context of B2B 2.0, we see that even sometimes unavoidable frustrations with outreach (e.g. unanswered calls) are overtaken by meaningful interactions and, ultimately, feelings of making a difference. Motivation was a large theme across the B2B 2.0 pilot effort, especially bolstered by how relational the process felt.

DOOR-KNOCKING AND SITE CANVASSING FINDINGS

For door-knocking, relational interactions - and in particular a deep sense of and display of empathy - were the foundation, persistence and practice were necessary, and continual tweaks in tools improved the experience throughout.

The canvassing efforts - both the door-knocking and site canvassing - had a different tone and tenor than the phone banks as they were led almost entirely by staff. Additionally, in our second pilot, we provided a little research training to canvassers and embedded researchers in the canvass where possible. This resulted in better documentation of the process and gave researchers more access to volunteers and staff to collect qualitative data - which in turn highlighted how important clear and consistent documentation efforts are to organic processes like this one.

The door-to-door and site canvassing generally followed the same pattern. They began with an introduction to T.O.N.E. U.P. as an organization, offering folks connection to resources and forming relationships with community members on the doors before shifting to providing folks with education about voting and the new voting rights law. The conversations ended with an invitation to connect and an offer to support the person at the door and their networks further.

More so than the phone banking, the door-knocking in particular provided experiences for relational engagement with community members that went beyond transactional get-out-the-vote efforts. One canvasser described her encounter following up with a woman who needed a ride to the polls (initially talked to during door-knocking) whose son was formerly disenfranchised:

"Two days before [the] election I gave her a call, "Hey I'm setting up my day, what time was best for me to pick you up?" Her response was, "Oh honey I thought you were lying," and I'm like, "No not at all like I told you I was gonna come get you take you to go vote and I meant it." So I picked her up to go vote and just beyond thankful it was such a beautiful experience to be able to pick her up [and] take her to go vote and afterwards I went to drop her off, make sure she gets home safe. She's like "Honey don't go anywhere"...She's like, "Stay right here," goes up to her house, comes back down and she brings me the most gorgeous rosary. And she's like, "I just am very thankful that you were able to take me to go vote." Gave me a hug and I feel like we were really able to just build that relationship of 'I'm not just out here you know promising the stars and the moon it's, no I'm telling you what I'm gonna do and I mean it.'"

Another of T.O.N.E. U.P.'s staff relayed how he approaches encounters with compassion and was able to turn around a conversation at a door that started out with person responding defensively:

*"I knew his name, which triggered him. I don't, he probably had, which he did, he had been incarcerated, of course. So he is like, 'how you know my name? How, you know I'm at this address, how...' You know, and my approach of - this is just a conversation change. And he went from why, like, why are you here? Da, da da, da, da. To like, and I appreciate you. You know what I mean? Because like I said, I have this saying, **I come with love and I leave with love...**"*

A sense and display of empathy is intertwined with and undergirds these interactions - underscoring the importance of formerly disenfranchised people leading these outreach efforts. **In particular, empathy for the vulnerability, fear, and trauma potentially held by formerly disenfranchised people is crucial.** Reflections from staff spanned understanding being yelled at, having visits end suddenly, or even for people's alarm as to how T.O.N.E. U.P. knew they were formerly disenfranchised. This included understanding people's ambivalence, nihilism, or even willful refusal to vote:

"She hadn't voted in 10 plus years...her son had been incarcerated for over 20 years... And so, she expressed that that was her way of getting back at the system. And that really resonated with me."

Empathy was also demonstrated to individuals beyond those who were knowingly formerly disenfranchised, with some participants displaying a sense of empathy for individuals experiencing other social struggles during their encounters while site canvassing. While the site canvassing was less targeted, it was helpful practice for staff and volunteers to connect with community members, distribute resources, and disseminate voting information.

Staff members new to door-knocking described an appreciation for the opportunity to practice and described feeling intimidated, nervous, and anxious until they were able to get some knocks under their belt. The abundance of chances to practice made a big difference for folks, though this also meant potentially greater disappointment when doors went unanswered. Some days very few people answered the door, with one staff expressing their frustration:

"I just don't know if it's a good use of time maybe, or maybe it's just a little bit hard on morale to just spend so much time knocking on doors where no one's home, so you're not really having a lot of interaction at all."

But staff remained resilient despite this frustration. As one staff member explained, "The fact that we're putting fliers out there makes us visible and that's a good first step." We saw visible improvement in the staff comfort-level and use of tools with each day on the doors, as staff had the opportunity to practice and as the technology and tools were updated to meet their needs.

Updates to tools, technology, and even training were responsive to changing needs as B2B 2.0 progressed. This included improving the ways that door-knocking routes were plotted out, printing out smaller (hand-out-sized) flyers with updated information (e.g. T.O.N.E. U.P.'s phone number), and adding training on specific topics as they arose (e.g. unique situations on the doors). Finally, the largest updates were technology-centric, both in the arrival and refinement of OurVoice during the pilot. Importantly, making the shift from CallHub to OurVoice meant that paid and volunteer canvassers had a much easier time executing this campaign.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF B2B 2.0

Ultimately, we found that it was the who and the how that made B2B 2.0 distinctive. We hope to emphasize the alchemy of this effort, with formerly disenfranchised people relationally reaching out to a targeted list of fellow formerly disenfranchised folks. Together, the key characteristics of this Block to the Ballot pilot were 1) its leadership and participants were credible messengers with criminal legal system experience, 2) we used a targeted list, and 3) the outreach prioritized a relational approach.

Previously disenfranchised people led this campaign, mirroring efforts in other states (Lewis & Rodriguez Calderon, 2021; Michaels, 2017). While this approach itself is not unique considering

the national landscape, we explored how this approach offered a unique effort here in Minnesota to center the experiences of people with criminal legal system experience. T.O.N.E. U.P.'s leadership exemplified this extra care.

Having our targeted list was pivotal for outreach and building connections, as few other campaigns have utilized such a specific list for door-knocking and phone banking. Some recent research has explored how mailer notifications may be an effective way to target re-enfranchised voters, yet this pilot effort to do what is often called "deep canvassing" with a list of Black, formerly disenfranchised, Minneapolis and St. Paul residents is the first of its kind. (Block, 2023; Doleac et al., 2023; Gerber et al., 2015).

With the support of the FIRC through the innovation of the OurVoice app, the collaboration connected with potential voters by going straight to their doors and calling them up - building relationships rather than just notifying them of their right to vote and leaving it at that. As Morris (2021) emphasizes, it takes more than just the passage of law (and mailers) to bridge the gap for potential voters to return to a system that has harmed them.

This approach is supported by research. Green (2019) conducted a series of experiments to provide insights to those seeking to launch or evaluate a voting campaign. Through his studies, he demonstrated that mobilizing voters is not merely a matter of reminding them that Election Day is near; it's not about just putting the information in front of them or telling them why they should vote. Instead, research revealed that to effectively mobilize voters you have to make them feel wanted at the polls. Personal invitations and warm interactions worked the best. Phone calls that actually meant something instead of repeating a script made them feel appreciated. This is supported by research as well, which demonstrates the importance of personalized, unhurried phone calls for getting out the vote (Nickerson, 2007). Additionally, Green (2019) found that building on a voter's pre-existing level of motivation to vote was also important. Calling back a voter who had previously expressed an intention to vote proved to be an effective mobilization tactic. When we compare what research shows to what T.O.N.E. U.P.'s effort looked and felt like, we can empirically say that the effort mixed all the required ingredients to deliver what could potentially be an effective tactic in future campaigns. Interviews with participants reflected this.

◆ **B2B 2.0: Leadership and Participants with System Experience**

Because leaders with system experience headed this pilot, many of the staff and volunteers - themselves formerly disenfranchised - were additionally motivated to do the work as they'd wished someone had been there for them upon reentry. This in turn led to a deeper sense of empathy and drive to the work. Their drive was not money or compensation, but recognition that they were doing what they would want others to do for themselves:

"Well, I wasn't trying to achieve, number one [on the phone bank leaderboard], I just was trying to achieve to reach as many people as I can before the voting started, so they could be able to vote. I wanted to inform them on what was going on that they didn't know that changed. 'Cause I know if it was me, I would want somebody to find me and let me know. So once I got off one call, I was motivated to make the next call, 'cause I was looking at these caller myself."

Of those participants who identified a connection to the criminal legal system, a significant number had personal encounters. A few people expressed knowing formerly disenfranchised people and some folks had co-occurring connections (their own and somebody they know):

"I personally...have grown up around people that have had experiences in the carceral system, and like have been in community with lots of folks that have, so...It wasn't out of

my comfort zone or out of something that I've experienced before for me personally."

"My background, I have family members that have been incarcerated...It seems very familiar to me to be...to get this message from the block to the ballot."

"[I'm] somebody who came from poverty and somebody who done seen both sides, the legal and illegal system, you know what I'm saying?"

Our data shows that this direct connection to our target population is a unique aspect of efforts like B2B 2.0, an important factor to consider when leading similar campaigns. Formerly disenfranchised individuals can and will emerge as leaders, forging bonds among those who share a common identity, and serve as connectors between individuals with direct experience and knowledge about the criminal justice system. They hold positions capable of influencing public policy and driving change (Sturm, 2017).

◆ **B2B 2.0: A Targeted List**

B2B 2.0 is distinct from other efforts not only for the people involved but also how outreach was conducted. The targeted list we utilized for B2B 2.0 combines the uniqueness of mobilizing formerly disenfranchised individuals with a novel outreach system linking B2B 2.0 right to their door or phone.

We know that, regardless of age, people with carceral experiences are less likely to be politically involved and are often neglected in get-out-the-vote efforts (Morris, 2021; Owens & Walker, 2018). Because of this, as well as the difficulty in creating accurate samples of disenfranchised citizens, having this targeted list is novel in more than one way and opens the door to better mobilize this voter bloc (Gerber et al., 2015; Burch, 2011).

◆ **B2B 2.0: Relational & Motivating**

Looking across the process and participants' reflections, the relational focus of B2B 2.0 came up again and again; to those involved, this is what makes B2B 2.0 truly unique. Participants linked this with their motivation to engage in outreach - driven by helping and connecting with others.

T.O.N.E. U.P. even used a relational approach for staffing and volunteer recruitment. As one staff member explained,

"Well, when I got out [of prison], I had met a guy...I was telling him the things that I wanted to do in the community and he was like, man, I know this organization that's already doing it...and he relayed that to [Antonio]...And then they brought me into the organization and I've been stepping ever since."

In our interviews, participants consistently expressed a strong sense of connection and willingness to engage with people. Many shared their feelings of fulfillment, making an impact through listening and providing information. They often spoke with enjoyment, satisfaction, and pride about interactions, even in challenging situations:

"Well, one of the things I really liked about block to the ballot is that we were there to offer resources to people. And I felt like people really responded very different to that because... Yeah, it was just like less extractive and "Hey, I'm here for you to do this for me." And more like, "Hey, we're here to try to help you, to try to offer you resources." And it's not supposed to be transactional and we really try to get away from that..."

Our interviews revealed that most people had a positive response from potential voters they

were contacting and, even if they were uninterested in voting in the November 2023 elections, they were interested in getting to know about T.O.N.E. U.P.'s services and resources. These positive responses, even redirected from the 'ultimate ask' of voting, also felt motivating for participants:

"So just being able to connect people to the proper network so that they can have support is really impactful to me. I think that that's something I'd like to continue to do if I can."

In addition to connecting community members to resources, volunteers and staff also reflected on the relational nature of connecting people to their right to vote. Participants explained how they felt the impact and importance of people having their right to vote restored and their role in helping them exercise that right.

"It felt nice knowing that I was actually helping people and when people would tell me that they didn't know that they could vote and that they were gonna do it, it felt like I was doing what the organization intended to do."

In addition, participants described a sense of contributing to a community and a larger movement as motivating during the B2B 2.0 process. People ultimately valued the relational aspect of the pilot and were more inclined to engage in future civic engagement activities because of their experience:

"I feel like when you pour into a community that hasn't been poured into a long time, you'll see beautiful results. And that's something that I was able to witness in this campaign, in the work that Tone Up is doing, that when we help our community out, we see each other thrive."

MAKING CONTACT CAN MOVE MINNESOTANS FROM THE BLOCK TO THE BALLOT

In addition to exploring the look and feel of the B2B 2.0 process and its unique characteristics, we examined whether the efforts had a measurable impact on voting behavior in the local elections. In the section that follows, we dig in to the quantitative data on B2B 2.0.

◆ REACH

We began with a list of just over 6,500 voters to reach through door-knocking and phone banking. T.O.N.E. U.P. staff focused their efforts on door-knocking and site canvassing, with a smaller reach but a more targeted and relational impact, while more calls were made by volunteers. Over a total of 37 door-knocking shifts within a few short weeks, the T.O.N.E. U.P. team (9 paid canvassers) along with a handful of volunteers (25 youth volunteers) knocked on a total of **518 doors** in Minneapolis and St. Paul (473 doors reached by the paid staff and 45 doors by the volunteers). Of these efforts, the team had 117 conversations, a **22.6% contact rate**. For the site canvassing efforts that were less targeted with the list, the T.O.N.E. U.P. team canvassed 127 hotspots in the Twin Cities area and had 23 meaningful contacts, **an 18% contact rate**, in addition to 8 follow-ups to support residents with services.

The phone banking effort had a wider reach. A total of 70 phone bankers (61 volunteers from 9 different organizations and 40 of whom were youth, along with 9 Paid Organizers who were all formerly disenfranchised T.O.N.E. U.P. staff) made calls over the course of 5 phone banks in October and early November. Using the data from the OurVoice app, we found that the outreach team made a total of 3,592 phone calls and connected with 395 people

for an **11% contact rate**. For a complete breakdown of call outcomes, see the table below.

Phone Outcome	N
Contacted	395
Deceased	6
Disconnected	690
Do not contact	44
Language Barrier	22
Left message	163
Moved/Wrong number	231
Not available	2,041
TOTAL	3,592

◆ **IMPACT**

The door-knocking and site canvassing efforts did not have a measurable impact on voting behavior. The sample sizes were too small to detect an effect. Additionally, much of the canvassing efforts on the doors and streets were less focused on the targeted list and more on the efforts to get out in community, make connections, and most importantly support people in need of resources.

The phone calls, however, showed promising results. We found that those with whom the outreach team had at least a brief conversation (n=395) were more likely to vote compared to a group of formerly disenfranchised Black Minneapolis and St. Paul residents we did not attempt to contact (n=1577). Specifically, we find that 2.6% of the uncontacted group voted in the election compared to 4.8% of the successfully contacted group. **Put another way, the formerly disenfranchised, Black, Twin Cities voters who had a conversation with a member of the B2B 2.0 outreach team were nearly twice as likely to vote in the fall election.**

Discussion: Lessons Learned

Taking our findings together, we see the significant quantitative impact on voting turnout alongside the unquantifiable impact on community-building and movement work that was possible with a small pilot in our second iteration of From the Ballot to the Ballot. Through the relational approach, focus on re-entry and resources, use of credible messengers alongside committed volunteers, and use of novel tools, we moved folks in our cities to exercise their right to vote. For some, this may have even been their first time. For others - like the voter who was given a ride to the polls through a promise she didn't expect to be followed up on - this was a memorable election.

Research shows that when formerly disenfranchised leaders reach out to formerly disenfranchised community members, they become bonders by maintaining ties and sharing resources; bridgers

by connecting with individuals who might otherwise not have access to supports and resources; and linkers by linking those with direct experience and knowledge of the criminal legal system to people in positions of power to influence public policy and change the public narrative (Sturm, 2017). We saw this play out in our B2B 2.0 pilot. This effort helped to demonstrate the importance of moving beyond the ballot by prioritizing a relational approach to build power and civic engagement potential among formerly disenfranchised individuals.

Sturm (2017) also shows us that formerly disenfranchised leaders can be nurtured through mentorship. Studies show that civic education opportunities can result in new leaders reflecting, thinking critically and systemically, and assuming responsibility for a positive impact on their community. By recruiting formerly disenfranchised Minnesotans to lead this work and connecting those with system experience to the organization, T.O.N.E. U.P. is working to both connect with community and build organizational catalysts uniquely positioned to be agents of change in the future.

But we also learned that these efforts are organic and require significant resources. Training and practice are necessary but challenging with a limited timeline. We learned that clean and accurate documentation is necessary but often falls by the wayside. Technology requires lots of troubleshooting. We learned that by starting small we can identify these needs and make improvements before scaling up.

The lived experience shared by the T.O.N.E. U.P. staff and people on the targeted list, fueled by a deep commitment to shape political participation, created a unique combination with valuable potential for future efforts to mobilize formerly disenfranchised individuals.

As one of T.O.N.E. U.P.'s staff put it:

"Improving, progressing, enhancing 'cause the more we enhance, the better the community becomes, the better the district becomes, the better the county, the better the state. And now we can implement what we're doing here in each other state and show them the process. Oh, it started - **one door, one community, one district, one county, one state.**"



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