



ACTIVIST'S

TOOL

KIT

DES MOINES



THE HAPPIEST
PEOPLE I'VE EVER MET,
REGARDLESS OF THEIR
PROFESSION, THEIR
SOCIAL STANDING
OR THEIR ECONOMIC STATUS
ARE PEOPLE THAT ARE
FULLY ENGAGED IN THE
WORK AROUND THEM.

THE MOST FULFILLED
PEOPLE ARE THE ONES WHO
GET UP EVERY MORNING AND
STAND FOR SOMETHING
LARGER THAN
THEMSELVES.

- WILMA
MANKILLER



This toolkit is designed to help you take action for the causes you care about in Des Moines and across Iowa. Whatever progress you are striving for in our community, this guide connects you with tools, resources, and organizations that make engagement easier and more effective.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Jump to the sections that fit your interests or goals. From voting and contacting decision-makers to protesting safely, supporting mutual aid, or joining local organizations—every section is a path toward community power. **An online version is available with valuable links using the QR code located below!**



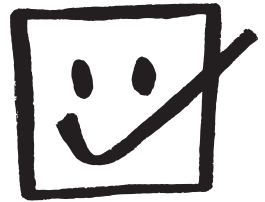
INDEX

Getting Started: Civic Foundations	3
Voter Empowerment Checklist	
Using Your Voice: Contacting Decision Makers	4
Best Practices for Advocacy	
Phone Calls, Emails, and Letters	
Building Relationships	
Understanding and Engaging Government	7
Contact Your Representatives	
Join a Local Board or Commission	
Direct Action: Protest, Boycott & Mutual Aid	9
Protest Rights	
Boycotting for Change	
Mutual Aid and Community Solidarity	
Protecting Yourself and Others	12
Know Your Rights	
Community Alternatives to 911	
Online Safety for Activists	
Collective Power: Building Movements	14
Supporting Unions & Strikes	
Join Local Organizing Efforts	
Storytelling and Influence	17
Letters to the Editor	
Getting Creative and Making it Fun	19
Alternative Activist Tactics	
Wikipedia for Activists	

GETTING STARTED: CIVIC FOUNDATIONS

Voter Empowerment Checklist

- Check your registration
- Register to vote
- Find your polling place
- Bring proper ID
 - *Iowa requires one of the following: driver's license, non-operator ID, U.S. passport, U.S. military/veteran's ID, tribal ID, or voter ID card.*
- Learn about candidates (VoteSmart provides nonpartisan information on candidate positions, campaign finance and voting records.)

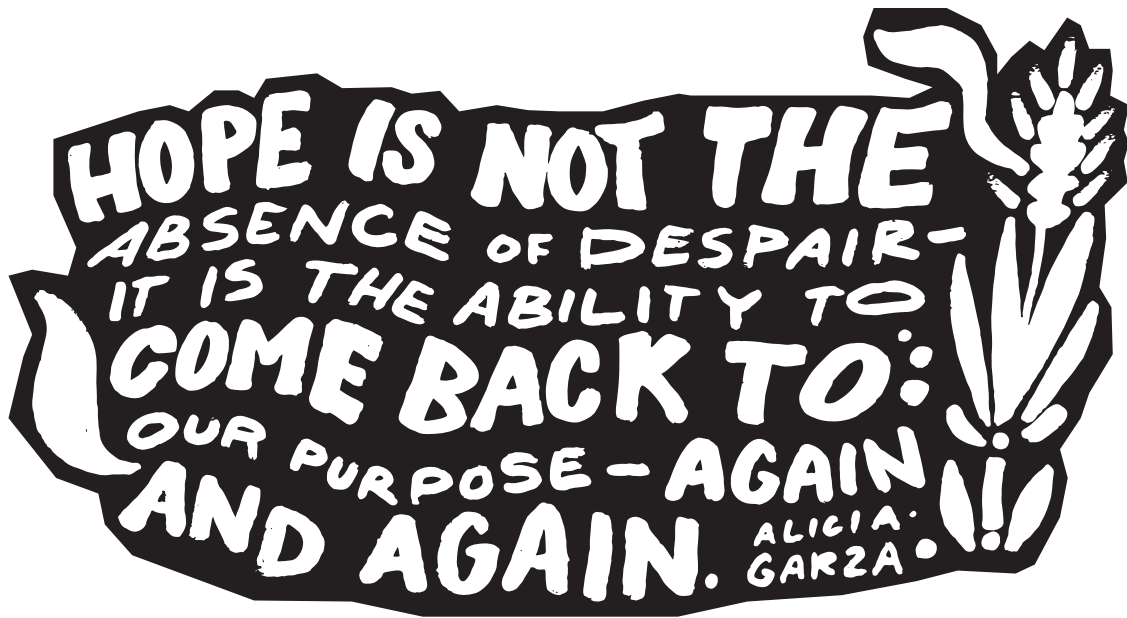


Why It Matters:

Local elections shape our schools, neighborhoods, safety, and environment. Voting is the foundation of advocacy. **Just remember – civic engagement doesn't stop at the voting booth!**



USING YOUR VOICE: CONTACTING DECISION MAKERS



Best Practices for Advocacy

- **Be concise**—focus on one issue or request.
- **Be respectful and professional.** Passion is powerful, but civility keeps the door open.
- **Personalize your message** - share your story or why the issue matters to you.
- **Make a clear ask** (e.g., "Vote yes on HF123 to expand mental health services.")
- **Combine facts + story for impact.** One strong stat plus a short personal example is memorable.
- **Follow up to see if they took action, and be sure to thank them if they did!**

Phone Calls

- **Prepare a short script:**
 - “Hello, I’m [Name] from [City]. I’m calling to ask [Senator Name] to oppose [Bill #] because it threatens [issue].”
- **Stay polite and brief** (under 2 minutes).
- **Leave your name, city, and zip code.**
- **Be strategic about when you call** – aim to reach out before key votes or hearings.



Emails

- **Use a clear subject line:** “Constituent request: Please support clean energy jobs (SF234)”
- **Identify yourself early:** “I’m a constituent in your district and a volunteer with [organization].”
- **Structure your message into 2-5 concise paragraphs:**
 - Who you are
 - Why you care
 - What you’re asking for
 - Thank them for their time
- **Personalize—don’t just copy and paste form letters.**

Letters (Printed or Handwritten)

- Use business-letter format with date, address and salutation.
- Keep it short, heartfelt, and issue-specific. (Note: Handwritten notes stand out!)
- Mention your civic engagement (“As a voter and volunteer in Des Moines...”)
- Mail it, then follow up by email.

Building Relationships Over Time

- Thank officials when they act positively!
- Attend town halls and community meetings.
- Coordinate with coalitions for visibility.
- Track your outreach and responses.
- Most elected officials have newsletters – sign up to hear what your representatives are saying and doing!

*Stay persistent and don't give up –
progress often takes time!*



UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING GOVERNMENT



Find and contact your elected state and federal representatives online!

2026 U.S. Senators:

Sen. Charles Grassley – (515) 288-1145

Sen. Joni Ernst – (515) 284-4574

2026 U.S. House Members

Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-1) – (563) 232-0930

Rep. Ashley Hinson (IA-2) – (319) 364-2288

Rep. Zach Nunn (IA-3) – (515) 400-8180

Rep. Randy Feenstra (IA-4) – (712) 224-4692



Local Government Resources

- Des Moines City Council: [Website](#) | [Sign up to speak](#) | [Meeting Calendar](#)
- Polk County Supervisors: [Website](#)
- Des Moines School Board: [Meetings](#) | [Sign up to speak](#)
- Neighborhood Associations: [Find yours](#)

Join a Local Board or Commission

Submit your name for consideration through Iowa's [Talent Bank](#) to take a more active role in local decision-making. **We gain power by claiming a seat at the table!**



4. DIRECT ACTION: PROTEST, BOYCOTT, & MUTUAL AID



Protest & Demonstration Rights

- You have the right to protest in public spaces like streets, sidewalks, parks and in front of government buildings. (Note: Private property owners can set rules for speech on their property.)
- Police may not confiscate or delete your photos or videos without a warrant.
- If stopped, stay calm, state your rights, and ask if you're free to leave.
- If detained or arrested, ask for a lawyer and remain silent.
- To issue a dispersal order, police must be able to demonstrate a clear and present danger of disorder, interference with traffic or immediate threat to public safety.
- **If your rights are violated:** document everything (including badge and/or patrol car numbers, and the agency they work for), take photos, get contact information for witnesses and file a complaint with the agency's internal affairs division or civilian complaint board

Boycotting for Change



Boycotting is one way to challenge unethical business practices. Not everyone can afford to boycott, and that's okay—do what you can.

- Follow boycott updates from [Ethical Consumer](#).
- Learn about “voting with your dollars” from [Mind Money Balance](#).
- **Always tell businesses why you're boycotting so your action is registered!**

Beyond boycotting – intentionally invest in businesses and community support networks you want to see thrive!



Mutual Aid & Community Solidarity

Mutual aid is about solidarity—not charity. It's people helping each other meet needs directly.

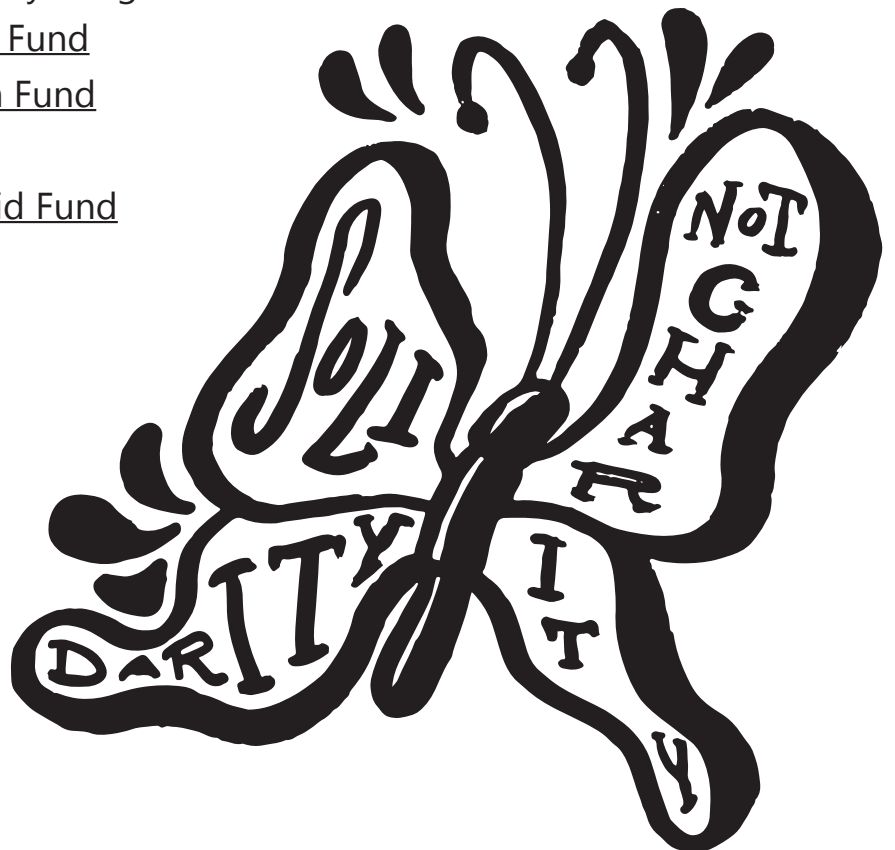
Support Iowa Mutual Aid

Projects:

[Donate](#) | [Mutual Aid Monthly](#)

Local projects include:

- [Camper Solidarity](#)
- [North DSM Community Fridge](#)
- [DSM Mutual Aid Bail Fund](#)
- [Prairiелands Freedom Fund](#)
- [The Supply Hive](#)
- [Iowa Trans Mutual Aid Fund](#)



PROTECTING YOURSELF & OTHERS

THE FIRST SURVIVAL
LESSON WE NEED TO REMEMBER
IF WE ARE TO KEEP GOING:
SERIOUS OPPOSITION
IS A MEASURE OF
SUCCESS. - GLORIA
STEINEM

Know Your Rights

- **You have the right to remain silent** based on 5 th Amendment rights. State this clearly.
- **You do not have to consent to searches** of your vehicle, home or belonging without a warrant based on 4 th Amendment rights.
- If ICE or police arrive at your home, **speak through the door and request to see a warrant.**
- If you believe your rights were violated, **write everything down** and file a complaint.

Community Alternatives to 911

(Provided by [Iowa Mutual Aid Network](#))

Mental Health Crisis: [UnityPoint Mobile Crisis Response](#) – 844-258-8858

Suicide Support: [IMAlive](#) | [Trans Lifeline](#) - 877-565-8860

Harm Reduction: [Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition](#) – 515-957-1252

Domestic Violence: [Children & Families of Iowa](#) – 515-243-6147

ICE Activity Hotline: 515-505-8805



Online Safety for Activists

Digital harassment and doxing are real threats. PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) provides strategies for protecting your digital and emotional safety.

COLLECTIVE POWER: BUILDING MOVEMENTS

SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO DO THE
WORK * EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T
* YET SEE A GLIMMER ON THE HORIZON
THAT IT'S ACTUALLY GOING TO BE
POSSIBLE. * - ANGELA
DAVIS *

Supporting Unions & Strikes

(From AFSC)

- Be active in your union or help organize one.
- Buy union-made products.
- Don't cross picket lines.
- Visit and show solidarity at strikes.
- Donate, share updates, and amplify worker voices.



Join Local Organizing Efforts

Below are Des Moines and Iowa-based organizations building community power. Each offers ways to get involved through education, volunteering, or advocacy.

Links to the organizations listed are available [online](#).

LGBTQ+ Rights

One Iowa Action – Grassroots advocacy for LGBTQ rights.

Iowa Safe Schools – Resources and support for LGBTQ youth.

Racial & Social Justice

Des Moines BLM Collective – Radical organizing for racial justice.

Just Voices – Ending racially biased policing.

NAACP Des Moines – Grassroots activism for civil rights.

Showing Up for Racial Justice DSM – Engaging white allies in racial justice work.

Community Empowerment & Mutual Aid

The Supply Hive – Mutual aid and nourishment networks.

Creative Visions – Empowerment and anti-violence programs.

Des Moines Catholic Worker – Hospitality and service to the poor.

Democracy & Civic Engagement

League of Women Voters of Iowa – Voter education and election reform.

Interfaith Alliance of Iowa – Defending democracy and religious freedom.

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement – Grassroots organizing for justice.

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom – Peace & grassroots organizing.

Vision Leads – Civic empowerment and training.



Environmental & Land Justice

Iowa Environmental Council – Climate and clean energy advocacy.

1000 Friends of Iowa – Sustainable land use and community design.

Great Plains Action Society – Indigenous-led environmental and civic engagement.

Immigrant, Disability & Family Legal Advocacy

Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice – Immigrant-led legal and organizing support.

Disability Rights Iowa – Free legal advocacy for Iowans with disabilities.

Friends of Iowa CASA – Volunteer advocacy for children in foster care.

Food & Housing Justice

Homeward – Housing collaboration to end homelessness.

Iowa Hunger Coalition – Advocacy for food justice.

Iowa Community Action Association – Reducing barriers for families in poverty.

Knock and Drop Iowa – Bridging the gap for underserved with food and basic necessities.

Labor & Farming

Iowa Farmers Union – Strengthening family farms and sustainable agriculture.

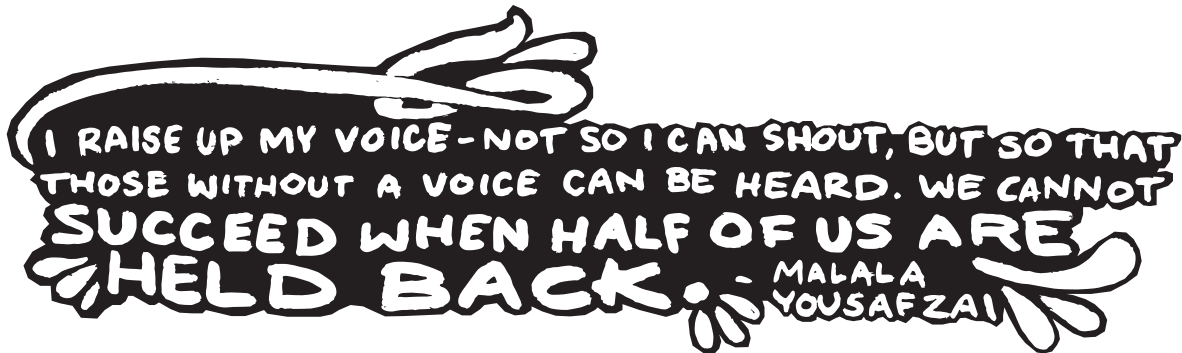
Cultivate – Building systems of support for local producers.

Teamsters Local 238 – Largest local union in Iowa – cross public & private sector.

Iowa Federation of Labor – State level federation representing different unions.

AFSCME Iowa Council 61 – Largest public employee union in Iowa.

STORYTELLING & INFLUENCE



Letters to the Editor

(Adapted from *Indivisible*)

Tips:

- Be sure to check and follow your newspaper's word limit.
- Focus on one issue. (If you have two – write a second letter!)
- Use clear, conversational language.
- Include your name, city, and contact info.
- Submit to smaller local papers for better chances of publication.

Why it Matters

Lawmakers read local papers and pay attention to constituent voices.

Not published? There are many ways to share your story and raise your voice!

- Share it on social media and tag your elected officials.
- Sign up to speak at a town hall or community meeting.
- Mail it as a letter or postcard
- Keep trying!

Here are some ways to get the attention of your lawmaker with your messaging:

1. Question their “brand.” Go to the “Biography” page of their website to see how they describe themselves. Then play on that. (ex. “Congresswoman Sara ran for office as a fiscally-responsible conservative. That’s why it’s ironic that she’s considering voting for this bill, which ___.”)

2. Know their record. Search around on the “issue” pages of their website to learn what they’ve said in the past on an issue. (ex. “Congresswoman Sara has said that she would only vote for a bill that did ___. This bill does the exact opposite: it ___.”)

3. Call them out-of-touch with the district. (ex. “Congresswoman Sara must be behind the times if she thinks people from ___ are still going to let their Representative in Congress say that ___ ...”)

4. Show them you have a long memory. Talk about an issue that’s not in the headlines to show you’re still paying attention. (ex. “Congress may not be in session, but families around the state are still holding their breath to see what will happen with ___ bill.”)

5. Put your letter in local terms and put your lawmaker on the spot. (ex. “My family has always gone to ___ Hospital. I’m really concerned about what would happen to it under the new bill Congresswoman Sara is considering.”)

6. Say thank you when they do the right thing. You will make their day and help keep them fighting the good fight if you thank them and reinforce their brand, speak knowledgeably about their record, or praise them for being tuned in to their district.



GETTING CREATIVE & MAKING IT FUN

REVOLUTION IS THE
HARMONY OF FORM AND COLOR,
AND EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS,
AND MOVES, UNDER ONLY ONE LAW
LIFE. NOBODY IS SEPERATE
FROM ANYBODY ELSE.
- FRIDA KAHLO

Alternative Activist Tactics

Explore a wide variety of creative disruption and civil disobedience tactics that are sure to grab attention (while having a bit of fun). **Beautiful Trouble has a more in-depth activist toolkit with tips on everything from organizing a flash mob to guerrilla projections, spoof websites to blockades.**

Beautiful Trouble goes into different theories and methodologies of activism that have been put into practice in the United States and abroad. Read examples of actions that had impact throughout history to stoke your activist imagination.

Wikipedia for Activists

Self-proclaimed the “the Wikipedia” for campaigners – **the Activist Handbook consists of 450+ guides and 4.7K external resources created by progressive, green and social activists from all over the world.** They also offer a free hotline for activists – you can schedule a 1hr call and get support by experienced campaigners in planning your action or campaign!

STAY
ENGAGED.
STAY
BOLD.
DES MOINES
NEEDS YOUR
VOICE!