



Building and encouraging “Citizen Infrastructure” is one of the keystones of our society. With historic frustration with Congress and government in general, people are finding a renewed sense of democratic participation. One of the similarities of the TEA Party movement and Occupy Wall Street is that they are both the result of people feeling alienated from their government and its decisions. Building citizen infrastructure is a way to strengthen positive engagement with elected leaders and government officials, encourage productive dialogue, and forge new solutions.

Solution

The first step to building citizen infrastructure is education. History and civics must be restored to prominence in the classroom. After all, engagement can be pretty intimidating when you don't understand how the system works and what the roles for federal, state, and local government play. Programs such as *We the People* where High School students study and compete using knowledge about the Constitution should be promoted and expanded. Government leaders should also partner with educational institutions for opportunities to expand citizen knowledge in specific areas, such as [Portland State University's "Transportation Class."](#)

Next, the war on voting should end. While many states are taking drastic steps to limit voter participation, we should actually be going in the other direction increasing the ability of citizens to participate using methods like allowing voter registration over the internet, early ballot access, and vote-by-mail, reforms which states like Oregon have already embraced.

Lastly, citizens must continue to feel engaged by their government. New technologies, from

email to twitter, are ways for government to connect with citizens on all levels. Embracing these new technologies not only leads to a greater degree of transparency, but also a greater sense of connection and ownership to their government. They can help keep citizens informed and promote a healthy exchange of ideas.

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