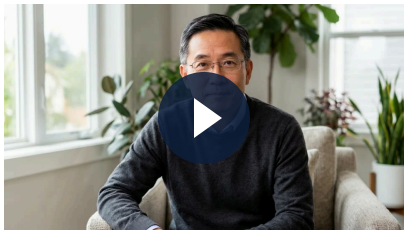
COLLECTION I — THE 12 POINTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Local Power — Citizen's Guide

Why local government matters most and how citizens can engage at the community level.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026



WATCH THE VIDEO

Local Power in 60 Seconds · 0:56

Watch it on American Civic Power or YouTube.

https://www.americancivicpower.com/goodgovernance#local-power

What it means

Local power means decisions should be made at the level closest to the people they affect, when that level can handle them well. Your town, village, county and school district set most of your property taxes, run your schools and roads, and decide what gets built next door.

Why it matters

Local government is where one engaged person can make the biggest difference. A few dozen residents at a meeting can change the outcome, and local races are often decided by a handful of votes.

Signs it's working

- Residents know who their local officials are.
- Local meetings are accessible and well attended.

- Local governments cooperate where sharing services saves money.
- Local races are contested, with real choices.

Warning signs

- Local officials no one can name.
- Decisions pushed to higher levels of government where residents have less say.
- Overlapping layers of government that no one fully understands.
- Uncontested local elections.

What you can do

1. Learn the layers that govern you. See *How Local Government Works in New York* and the *Long Island Civic Guide*.
2. Attend one town board, county legislature or school board meeting.
3. Vote in local elections, including school budget votes in May.
4. Consider serving on a local board or running for local office.

Related points

Participation, Responsiveness, Strategic Vision.

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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