



## APPENDIX B

### ALA LTC Grant: Smart Voter, Active Voter | Conversation Notes and Summaries

#### Top-Level Summary from All Conversations

##### State Civic Information

Attendees would like to be able to find candidate information, voting positions of Stratham representatives in the NH House and Senate, what bills are coming up for a vote or public comment, if Stratham's reps have a position, and what impact it will have on Strathamites.

##### Library Voter Information Night

Voter Information Night is valued, especially with the virtual option. This is the one event in Town that focuses on civic information for local elections, School Boards, and Town Meeting. In fact, the only criticism was how tough it is to cover everything in one event; people wish that there was more time for Q&A and to dig a little deeper into a few "hot" topics.

##### Basic Process Knowledge

There is a need for some "basics:" a Voter 101-type series, reaching more people to increase participation, and more video/remote access to meetings, events, and candidates.

##### Unbiased Civic Information

There are many obstacles to getting (and sometimes recognizing) neutral, unbiased information. Divisiveness in local politics is a growing concern.

#### Conversations Framing

Grant: where from, goals, ultimate product

What brings you here today?

As a local voter, what information do you want and need?

What is hard to find?

What is missing?

What is working?

How do we get local information in general?

Do any of these include civic information?

Could (more) civic information be effectively added?

So... What might improve what's working or make progress on what isn't?

Who is missing from this room? *Please pass along the days/times of our other two conversations. This issue impacts all of us and we need everyone's voices.*

#### Overall Demographics Included

- Retired
- Long-time residents and natives
- New residents

- Involved on/elected to Boards & Committees
- Local event leader
- Immigrants
- School Guidance Counselor
- Parents (all ages, including college-aged)
- Agriculture industry

## CONVERSATIONS NOTES

### Conversation #1 April 12, 2022 Attendance: 8

#### TAKEAWAYS

- How do I know if I should care?
- There is more information than ever but it is hard to find or too much.
- More centralization. Easier access.
- Need State information too (still impacts Town).
- Information needed in advance of opportunities to comment or participate.
- Need to investigate how the Town can reach every household with some information.
- *Not only individual voter frustration but also frustration between groups of voters... (Town Meeting vs. All-ballot). Outside of the scope of this project, but good to know!*
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#### As a local voter, what information do you want and need?

- Election results
- Cooperative Middle School election results, School Board decisions
- Central calendar of public meetings, agendas
- State legislature – what bills are coming up that we can comment on, etc.
- What is currently on docket for Boards
- What are the goals, priorities for the year – ie: Select Board
- Connections to local political groups

#### What is hard to find?

- Election results – esp Middle/High School
- Meetings calendar
- State bills and information
- What Boards are doing
- What is Town Meeting government
- Who to ask
- Initiatives: are there deadlines? Am I supposed to do something? What am I supposed to do? (example was new trash pickup and the bin process)



#### What is missing?

- More detail about what Boards will be discussing and voting on – enough ahead of time to participate!
- Summaries of meetings sooner (not minutes – more reporting)
- NH legislative business
- Voting logistics: can register day of, how to register, voting absentee, how to file/run
- Explanation of form of government (new voters and residents not familiar with Town Meeting Form)

#### What is working?

- Voter Information Night
- Town website (for some things, but hard to find)
- Select Board newsletter
- Electronic signs (usually)

#### How do we get local information in general? Do you go to different places for different information?

- Select Board newsletter (Town events, trash pickup changes, Town Clerk/Tax notifications, local Town topics (PFAS), dog licensing)
- Library newsletter (events at library, reading recs, interesting news/articles)
- Subscriptions to agendas/minutes for various committees, boards (Town website)
- Newspaper (less and less)
- Electronic sign in Stratham Circle (immediate info)
- Schools (School Board info – very hard to access!)
- Stratham Magazine (general local)
- Facebook / Stratham Talks [most of the group not on FB however] contractor or service recs, neighborhood happenings, what is being complained about.
- Word of mouth.

#### Do any of these include civic information?

- Newspaper (less and less)
- Select Board newsletter
- Electronic signs (where, when to vote)
- Library newsletter (around VIN)
- FB/Stratham Talks
- Town website
- Word of mouth

#### Could (more) civic information be effectively added?

- Newspaper: Yes
- SB newsletter: Yes
- Electronic signs: No
- Library newsletter: No
- Facebook/Stratham Talks: Yes (duplicate of other places)



- Town website: Yes

What might improve what's working or make progress on what isn't?

- SB Newsletter working VERY well: (maybe add some of the things from below). Have the info about how to subscribe EVERYWHERE! Very visible. At Town Board meetings, anything public attends, Stratham Talks, every SB newsletter, Facebook (pinned post?), Town website – in banner? Big button? Good insert in tax bill (see reach everyone below). Even involved people at this conversation didn't know about it.
- Voter Information Night working VERY well.
- Links to meeting calendar/agenda, committees/boards, library, etc. Centralized.
- Links with “teasers” – Here's a topic at an upcoming meeting, here's a goal, public comment session coming up...
- HOW DO I KNOW IF I SHOULD CARE?
- THERE IS MORE INFORMATION THAN EVER BUT IT IS HARD TO FIND OR TOO MUCH
- “Town Hall” style event with Stratham's Reps and Senator. Maybe once/twice year. Also a written summary.
- Always have civic information meetings/events with a remote option. Also recorded.
- Why aren't public meetings live on a local access cable channel (like Exeter)? Or streamed online and/or recorded? VERY high interest for this group. Want information about how local access works? What would costs be? How does it work with Comcast.
- Some way to find out what other groups might be a source for civic/political info? (Stratham Dems, Republicans, EDI groups, other)
- Central location to find tools – Citizens Count, local Dem/Rep, Who is my representative, etc. Does General Court publish an “easy” list of bills for the session?
- REACH EVERYONE: Stratham Magazine, bulk mail, inserts with tax bills, opt-out for SB newsletter instead of opt-in
- Make information gathering and distributing easier: ie: take a picture of calendar in Senior Room instead of typing out upcoming events for SB newsletter
- Centralized events calendar (separate from meeting calendar or combined...).
- Town Govt 101.
- Survey of voters after summary of this project: would you be interested in... Live meetings, mailed information, different communication channels, etc.
- Use Condo Associations to spread information and also provide feedback.
- Newspaper reporters at meetings, events even when no controversial topic. Would newspapers give Town some column space at least part of year?
- Need multiple communication channels for generational, cultural differences – how to keep it all consistent?
- Town websites are very hard to navigate.

**Conversation #2 April 14, 2022 Attendance: 6**



## TAKEAWAYS

- Try to find out who is interested but not accessing/finding information?
- Use Stratham Magazine for civic info.
- Need State information too.
- Co-op District candidates are very confusing.
- Create visual pieces of information (calendar, infographics), accessible not only online.
- Broadcast and record/archive meetings.
- Need neutral, consistent, and meaningful info on candidates (including positions)

As a local voter, what information do you want and need?

- Election results.
- Board and commission meeting recorded or streamed.
- County information.
- State legislature – what bills are coming up that we can comment on, etc.
- How do all of the different areas work – how is ERCSD different from Stratham District from Town meeting? Esp. ERCSD candidates from all 6 towns.
- Candidate info, background, stances on issues.

What is hard to find or missing?

- Discussions and votes at meetings.
- Candidate profiles.
- State bills and information.
- What Boards are doing, going to discuss.
- ERCSD information.
- Who to ask

Comments:

- There needs to be more interest in politics. People need to pay more attention instead of saying “I don’t know anything about what’s happening.”
- If you are active in Town, you can answer others’ questions. If not, you aren’t in the loop.
- I’ve been voting in Town since 1991. Surprised how many people don’t know what’s happening.
- If there are 1,700 people on SB newsletter, why only 50 at Town Meeting.
- There aren’t reporters at meetings.
- There is more info than ever – but maybe can’t find it, or it is too much.

Trusted sources/channels for civic info:

- Voter Information Night
- Select Board newsletter
- Voter Guide
- Newspaper
- Library
- NOT Facebook (want facts, not opinions)

Suggestions/ideas:

- SB Newsletter working VERY well: would like to see more links to follow whatever interests you. (ie: links to Planning Board, etc. IF the info on their pages is useful)
  - Links with “teasers” – Here’s a topic at an upcoming meeting, here’s a goal, public comment session coming up...
  - Put subscription info everywhere – increase subscribers as much as possible.
  - Could it somehow be opt-out instead?
- Voter Information Night working VERY well. Hybrid format is essential to reach more people.
- Civic chats? Discussions like this but a few times/year. Need to build interest first.
- Town Government 101 – for new (and not so new) residents.
  - How do I vote?
  - Switching party at primary
  - How to register
  - Absentee voting
  - What is the impact of attending deliberative session? Town meeting? Etc.
- Who is interested – other than those with very strong opinions or agendas?
  - Don’t need to reach everyone (which is impossible). We just need to get info to those who are interested but don’t know how to access.
- Why aren’t people interested?
  - People don’t see the connection between Town Gov’t and everyday life.
  - Frame communications: here’s how this impacts you. You have a say in how much it costs you.
  - Visual materials: David’s dollar, image showing “layers” of govt or connections
- Why was 2022 local elections 23% turnout when usually 10%?
- Voter Guide – how can people access if not tech savvy?
- Voter Candidate guide: same questions and info from each candidate. From a neutral source. How to make available to all (not just online)?
- Use teasers/links on calendars too. One calendar with all govt “stuff” on it.
  - Could use a Google calendar and people could choose to filter by areas they are interested in.
- Links that would be useful everywhere: Public meeting calendar, Departments, Boards, Events --- Or those are places that should have links to important info.
  - Trail Mgmt, SHS events, Car registration, Blood Drives, with Utility info
- Color coded Town/Civic Calendar @ end of Dec. Mail, Stratham Mag
- Meet the Town Planner; Meet the School Board Q/A sessions. What do people do?
- Fairness Funding Project, non-partisan – funds for initiatives maybe
- Should be using Stratham Magazine
  - Get people together to brainstorm a year’s worth of content, people volunteer to write. Lead time doesn’t matter if it is Govt 101 or meet town staff.





- Blue Hawk Media – broadcasts meetings (Exeter). Can they do Stratham too?
- Interested in connections instead of party (?I don't remember what this means)
- Need to have some communications targeted for generational and cultural differences.

### Conversation #3 April 16, 2022 Attendance: 4

#### TAKEAWAYS

- Consistent, neutral candidate information beyond VIN (so brief).
- Link to all communication channels in one place.
- How does Gov't/School work in Stratham, NH.
- Develop targeted spots for communication and use consistently.
- Make getting info and participating easier.

#### As a local voter, what information do you want and need?

- Candidate Info. Names; what they are running for; Their positions on local issues; Bio/background;
- When/where elections are happening

#### Where do we get local info in general?

- Neighbors, Friends
- State reps (availability?)
- People in Town
- Town staff
- Town website
- Seacoast Online – editorials can be helpful but not consistently or intentionally balanced.  
And: paywall [LK: Can this be more accessible? Would SO work with us to make certain things available with login?]

#### What is hard to find or missing?

- Candidate profiles: Seacoast Online ones are behind paywall.
- State bills and votes; candidates; who are reps/senate/executive council
- How can I get involved without joining a board or committee?
- New, young, early, and mid-career voters need to know how to get involved.
  - They need to have info to see what they care about locally

#### Comments:

- Did not know that Voter Info Night is recorded/recording is available.
- There are so many channels. How to reach everyone?
- It is actually hard to participate and vote. Schedule of Town Meeting esp.
- So much information that is a lot on top of everything else we need to pay attention to.
- Systems are very complex – those few who do understand it have more influence. This is NOT sustainable.
- How do we invite everyone in with the knowledge needed to participate AND make a difference?

- Concerns about educated voting (vs. “just showing up for ballot”). Other perceptions are that Stratham is actually very engaged and interested.
- Who is neutral?

Suggestions/ideas:

- Candidate info: the standard profiles that newspapers used to do but accessible to everyone.
  - Advance Voter Guide: 2 weeks before elections
    - Consistent format for each candidate
    - Give the questions to candidates when they file [LK: allowed?]
    - If a candidate doesn’t respond or doesn’t want to, still include them just with Name, position, town of residence
  - Could be an insert in a daily paper? Paid for by businesses?
- Stratham Magazine annual Voting Issue. Possible to do an insert to avoid problems with lead time?
- The electronic signs for election info are great.
- Use specific channels/places to target groups. Who do we want to reach? Where will they see this info?
  - SMS marquee
  - Town/Library web sites
  - Local groups (Rotary?)
  - Other places for signs?
- Make it easier to find subscription links (to get agendas/minutes, etc.) on web site – better promotion that these are available.
  - Link to all other Town newsletters (incl library), social media at bottom.
  - Use QR codes on signs, etc. to the newsletter subscription.
  - Create a targeted info page for different interests – include where to subscribe to updates. [LK: any way to sign up with a Board or department to get follow-ups on a particular issue? Maybe too complicated and time intensive]
- All newsletters have a standard format; identify most important info, be consistent.
- A few voter conversations scheduled per year? Make connections, build understanding, ask questions.
- At voter information night – mention every position and person on the ballot.
- Bring information to where people are: soccer games, events (see QR code suggestion above). HOA, Developments, Neighborhoods.
  - Is there a way to measure engagement at different points? Know what efforts are most effective?
- State Gov’t info needed:





- How does State Gov't work?
- Who are the reps for Stratham?
- What is being discussed/voted on?
- Can reps have local "office hours" or town halls at the library?
- A visual representation of layers of gov't and what gets decided where
  - NH – Stratham
  - School, Town, Co-op
  - Elected, appointed

### **Conversation with Individual April 1, 2022 Attendance: 1**

#### Post Town meeting in response to invitation to conversations

##### **TAKEAWAYS**

- Central, neutral presentation of candidate backgrounds and positions. [LK – maybe would help condense presentations at VIN]
- Town Meeting remains a problem for timing, attendance. Different people want/need very different things.
- Town Staff is a huge benefit in making connections with voters and making experiences more accessible and pleasant.

#### As a local voter, what information do you want and need?

- Candidate Info. More easily accessible, neutral

#### What is hard to find or missing?

- Candidate info:
  - Fewer social connections = less word-of-mouth recommendations.
  - Local newspaper is very limited and doesn't reach many people anymore.
  - Candidate or group-produced info is biased
  - Social media is unpredictable/"rabbit hole" and lots of people don't use.

#### Comments:

- VIN is great (esp hybrid) but not enough time to really get into answers and critical issues for candidates.
- VIN is doing warrant articles part fine.

#### Suggestions/ideas:

- Create expanded voter information platform.
  - Place for each candidate to provide a bio as detailed or as cursory as they wish.
  - Longer-format place for each candidate to answer a longer list of questions that directly address key issues, without limits of time or characters/words.
- Time at VIN
  - Contested races: opposing candidates should address the questions back to back – esp important for Co-op races. For example hear 3 candidates for Brentwood seat answer the question, then the two Exeter candidates, etc.



- Instead of all co-op candidates at one table, maybe just competing candidates at one time – matches how we vote on ballot.
- Town Meeting:
  - CMS GREAT venue. A/V, seating
  - Excellent presence/integration of Town staff – “smiling faces, clear id cards, greeting at entrance and points on the way into auditorium.” GREAT introducing them at beginning. And including not just department heads (Karen, Denise)
  - Recognitions of volunteers (Joe, Flossie) – very good, but don’t let them go too long.
  - Saturday isn’t as popular with people I know as Friday night. Some miss social events that used to happen after Town Meeting in evening. [LK: these gatherings were quite exclusive IMO]
  - Powerpoint presentation had some errors and was hard to read certain slides. Don’t want to damage credibility.