“What I expect from you is that you keep this renewed sense of community alive; that you see your stake in each other every day; that you ask what you can do to make Massachusetts stronger and do it.”
--Deval Patrick, Hynes Convention Center, Nov. 7, 2006

DEVAL PATRICK / TIM MURRAY TRANSITION TEAM
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

At the Civic Engagement Working Group’s public meeting in Lawrence, one of the group members asked AmeriCorps member Andres Gonzales what made him decide to turn his life around. His answer was riveting:

“A bullet, a bullet to the chest. That’s what made me turn my life around. I was a young man who was into violence and all the wrong things, and one day I was at the end of a bad fight, and I ended up getting shot in the chest. Laying on the floor asking someone to take care of my child was a thing that sat heavy with me. So I had a second chance, thank God, and I came back, and when I came back it was to change the community and all the people in my environment.”

Although Mr. Gonzales may have offered the most dramatic testimony we heard, his commitment to community service and civic life was not unique – far from it. Our Working Group has been deeply impressed by the passion and commitment of scores of people from all walks of life who took the time to present their vision of engagement with their communities and their government, and to speak for a public that truly yearns to “check back in.” As it considered the often profound testimony of community organizers, local leaders, and individuals with important stories to tell and suggestions to offer, the Civic Engagement Working Group was moved by the tenet that it should not take a bullet to activate an interest in public service.

Based upon the often emotional and compelling input from people across the state, the Civic Engagement Working Group presents this Report and set of Recommendations to the Patrick/Murray administration. For all of us, the experience of hearing directly from the people of Massachusetts their ideas of how to engage with each other and with their elected officials was both exhilarating and humbling. We are grateful to Governor-elect Patrick, Lt. Governor-elect Murray, and the Transition Team for entrusting us with that responsibility.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Civic Engagement Working Group was asked to consider and explore three principles:

- Converting the grassroots campaign into a way of governing;
- Increasing civic engagement; and
- Rebuilding communities throughout the state.

Based on the testimony we received, and drawing on the background and expertise of the Working Group’s members, we found that ideas for how to make these principles into a reality broke down into two large categories of topics: changing the culture of government, and encouraging and expanding opportunities for service.

Within the first category, changing the culture of government, our key recommendations include:

- **Find ways to bring the voice of the people back into the government.** Examples include enhancing government’s responsiveness through a new Office of Civic Engagement, which will work with agencies as well as the Governor’s staff, and through a redesigned Mass.gov website with an improved user interface; improving the experience of people who come to the State House to testify or otherwise interact directly with their government; making it easier for citizens to vote, including same-day voter registration and an improved experience at the polls; and convening public advisory groups to continue dialogue with the administration on important issues.

- **Find ways to take the government directly to the people.** Examples include holding a series of regional town meetings with the Governor, Lt. Governor, cabinet secretaries, and agency heads; drawing on the expertise of state employees in helping communities address matters of public concern; making use of media such as radio, cable television, webcasting, and blogging to bring the Governor and Lt. Governor directly to the people; and investigating the establishment of regional Offices of the Governor around the state.

Within the second category, encouraging and expanding opportunities for service, our key recommendations include:

- **Raise the profile of and provide resources for existing service organizations.** Examples include convening a summit for the service community within the administration’s first 100 days; leading by example through personal involvement in service; enhancing and promoting the “Connect and Serve” website as part of a Mass.gov overhaul; promoting the use of public libraries as centers for civic engagement; and in general finding ways to promote the outstanding work of
existing nonprofit service organizations rather than trying to “reinvent the wheel.”

- **Support civics education and community service-learning in schools and state colleges.** Examples include expanding existing civics curricula and making them mandatory both for high school and for younger students; expanding the use of youth councils in the schools to encourage service-learning for all ages; and encourage colleges to shift federal work-study funds to “serve-study” positions.

- **Engage corporate, philanthropic, and faith-based organizations to support expanded community service.** Examples include encouraging CEOs to authorize 40 hours a year of paid leave for employees who want to perform community service; encouraging corporations and philanthropists to match state funds spent on service; and leveraging and promoting the work of faith-based organizations in community service.

- **Create a 1,000-person “Commonwealth Corps.”** This proposal would create a corps of 500 full-time and 500 part-time paid members, who would be used to mobilize 100,000 volunteers in high-impact local projects.

We believe that each of our recommendations advances one or more aspects of a three-stage civic engagement process: (1) *laying the groundwork*, which includes civics education and other strategies to inculcate the values needed for civic engagement; (2) *expanding opportunities*, which includes election reforms, promoting the work of existing service organizations, and other means of enhancing the public’s ability to become civically engaged; and (3) *changing the culture*, which includes transforming the government’s desire and ability to respond to public input, as well as more broadly encouraging people to engage with their neighbors and their government (in other words, to “check back in”). Each of these three stages is a necessary but not sufficient aspect of a plan to enhance civic engagement; all of them must be part of any overall strategy. We believe that the new administration’s commitment to increasing civic engagement in Massachusetts represents a truly historic opportunity, and that realizing that opportunity will not only stand as a signature achievement of the Patrick/Murray administration, but has the potential to transform civic life in Massachusetts for many years to come.
I. Summary of Outreach Efforts

The Civic Engagement Working Group held five public meetings in Millbury, Boston, Roxbury, North Dartmouth, and Lawrence, which were attended by a total of over 500 people. We also met with and heard from a number of nonprofit organizations, academics, and others interested in civic engagement, and we received hundreds of comments on the Patrick/Murray Transition website, on BlueMassGroup.com, and by email to individual group members. In addition to these comments, members of the Working Group reached out informally to their contacts in the community for ideas and feedback and had follow-up discussions with people who provided comments through the public channels. A detailed breakdown of our structured outreach efforts follows. Transcripts of all of our public meetings are attached in the Appendix to this Report.

A. Community Meetings for Public Testimony:

Millbury Community Meeting (with K-12 Working Group), 12/5/2006
1. Approximate attendees: 100
2. Approximate speakers: 24
3. Committee Members Present: Gail Snowden, David Kravitz, Nancy O’Connor Stolberg, Ron Bell, Margaret Xifaras, Richard Glovsky, Bishop Walter Weekes, David Roach, Maureen Curley, Eric Schwarz, Carlos Ferre, Tripp Jones, Alex Goldstein (staff)
4. Organizations Represented
   a. Robert Maier- Director of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
   b. Cynthia Basinet- English teacher, Auburn High School
   c. Alan Melchior- Deputy Director of the Center for Youth and Community at Brandeis University
   d. Roger Desrosiers- State Coordinator, “We the People” program
   e. Leann Erickson, Mount Wachusett Community College Faculty
   f. Ms. White – American Association of Persons with Disabilities
   g. Adrian Blaisdell, student, Blackstone Valley Youth Leadership Academy
   h. Margo Barnet- Vice President, Community Gardens, Worcester
   i. Cynthia Burr- Literacy Volunteer, Worcester Library
   j. Luz Ramirez- Organizer, Worcester Chapter of Neighbor to Neighbor
   k. Shelley Berman- Superintendent of Schools, Hudson, MA
   l. Avi Green- MassVote
   m. Pam Wilmot- Executive Director of Common Cause
   n. Chuck Lidz- Director of Mental Health Services, University of Massachusetts
   o. Mary McCarthy- Director of Community Service Learning and Character Education, Hudson Public Schools
UMass-Boston Community Meeting (with Higher Education Working Group),
12/6/2006
1. Approximate attendees: 150
2. Approximate speakers: 35
3. Committee Members Present: Gail Snowden, David Roach, Richard Glovsky, Cameron Kerry
4. Organizations Represented
   a. Janice Motta- Executive Director of the Massachusetts Community Colleges
   b. Susan Moire- Director of Labor Resource Center, UMass Boston
   c. Marilyn Frankenstein- Professor of Quantitative Reasoning, College of Public and Community Service, UMass Boston
   d. George Noel- Vice President of Mass. AFL-CIO, executive vice-president of the Merrimack Valley Central Labor Council
   e. Erica Weinberg- Executive Director of Jumpstart
   f. Jeff Stone- Founder and Director of the Citywide Dialogues on Boston’s Ethnic and Racial Diversity
   g. Anita Gonzalez Cecckin- Kids for Democracy

Roxbury Community Meeting, 12/6/2006
1. Approximate attendees: 200
2. Approximate speakers: 40
3. Committee Members Present: Gail Snowden, David Kravitz, David Roach, Carlos Ferre, Richard Glovsky, Maureen Curley, Ron Bell, Cameron Kerry, Alan Khazei, Harris Gruman, Eric Schwarz
4. Organizations Represented:
   a. Joe Eigerman- Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
   b. Mary Gunn- Director, Generations Incorporated
   c. Matt Wilson- Field Director, Moveon.org
   e. Franklyn Salimbene- Director, Bentley College Service Leaning Center
   f. David Shapiro- Executive Director, Mass. Mentoring
   g. Mukiya Baker-Gomez, Chief of Staff, Rep. Gloria Fox
   h. Edward Loechler, Member, Massachusetts Citizens for Voting Integrity
   i. Joseph Porcelli- Founder and Organizer, Neighbors for Neighbors
   j. Charles Blandy- Blue Mass Group Blog
   k. Don Levy, Boston Workers Alliance
   l. Elba Valerio, City Year
   m. Miriam Messinger- Executive Director, The City School
   n. Bill Snyder-Founder, Social Capital Group
   o. Chris Tsang- Co-chair, National Asian/Pacific American Educators Association
North Dartmouth (South Coast) Community Meeting (with Technology Working Group), 12/7/06

1. Approximate attendees: 60
2. Approximate speakers: 22
3. Committee Members Present: David Kravitz, Cameron Kerry, Margaret Xifaras, David Roach, Nancy O’Connor Stolberg
4. Organizations Represented: TBD pending completion of transcript.

Lawrence Community Meeting- Lawrence Senior Center 12/11/2006

1. Approximate Attendees: 75
2. Approximate speakers: 17
3. Committee Members Present: Nancy O’Connor Stolberg, David Kravitz, David Roach, Mojdeh Rohani, Richard Glovsky, Wilnelia Rivera (for Harris Gruman, Neighbor to Neighbor)
4. Organizations Represented:
   a. Debbie Banda- American Association of Retired Persons
   b. Tom Lang- Know Thy Neighbor
   c. Maria Payano- Lawrence Youth Council
   d. Andres Gonzales- Youth Build
   e. Liz Jackson- Neighbor to Neighbor
   f. Amy Palmerino- Stoneham Community Access TV
   g. William Solomon- Stoneham Town Council
   h. Susan Haltmaier- North Andover Democratic Town Committee
   i. Martina Cruz- Lawrence School Committee
   j. Brendan Bridgeland- Center for Insurance Research
   k. Angie Mayorga- Lawrence Teen Council

B. Roundtable Discussions:

Committee Members Present: David Kravitz, Alan Khazei, Harris Gruman


1. Approximate attendees: 120
2. Approximate Speakers: 24
3. Committee Members Present: Cameron Kerry, David Kravitz, Nancy Stolberg, Harris Gruman, Margaret Xifaras, Alex Goldstein (Staff)
4. Organizations Represented
   a. Jenny Amory- Director, Teen Voices
   b. Cindy Rowe- Chair, Brookline Democratic Town Committee
   c. State Representative Frank Smizik

5. Unaffiliated Speakers: 19

Committee Members Present: Ron Bell, Margaret Xifaras, David Kravitz, Harris Gruman
Organizations Represented:
   a. MassVOTE
   b. Rep. Petruccelli
   c. Sen. Augustus
   d. Oiste
   e. Commonwealth Seminar
   f. Neighbor to Neighbor
   g. Minority Outreach Voter Education
   h. Chinese Progressive Association
   i. Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

MassINC Roundtable, 12/8/2006
Committee Member Present: David Kravitz
Organizations represented:
   a. Mass. Service Alliance
   b. Boston Cares
   c. Civic Ventures
   d. Commonwealth Seminar
   e. Social Capital, Inc.
   f. United Way
   g. The Boston Foundation
   h. Campus Compact
   i. Mass. Business Roundtable
   j. City-Wide Dialogues on Boston’s Racial and Ethnic Diversity

C. Internet Submissions

1. Over 200 responses from the www.patrickmurraytransition.org website, from 188 different Zip Codes.
3. 14 proposals emailed directly to members of the working group.

D. Additional Outreach

- Massachusetts Service Alliance
- East Boston Ecumenical Community Council
- Lowell Community Health Centers
II. Common Themes

A number of identifiable themes emerged repeatedly at our public meetings, in discussions with interested parties, and in comments received via the internet. *In no particular order*, the most commonly discussed themes were:

- Regional Public Meetings with the Governor and Lt. Governor
- Technological improvements to facilitate rapid response to public input
- Making the State House hearing process more respectful and inclusive of “regular” citizens that wish to testify
- Election-day registration and concerns about polling place culture and practice
- Encouragement and expansion of state employee volunteer opportunities
- Frequent radio and cable TV addresses
- Regional statehouse offices
- Improving Mass.gov
- Expansion of civics education in schools
- Encouraging service-learning in schools and colleges
- Leveraging and raising the profile of existing service organizations
RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Changing the Culture of Government

“When there’s a lot of talking and talking and not doing and not doing, people become discouraged. So one of the great ways to do it is to see when people are in meetings and they bring their issues and they see that something changes…. We want to see a different way of government and we want to see that and we are so pleased to see that happen, but as I say, we need to see action, and that would be the big key to people being engaged in the process.” --Martina Cruz, Lawrence public meeting (12/11/06)

State government has a reputation for being inaccessible to ordinary people, for favoring the interests of the well-connected and the well-heeled, and for not taking seriously the concerns of many residents of Massachusetts. That reputation is sometimes (but not always) well-deserved. We believe that one of the signature accomplishments of the Patrick/Murray Administration can be to change the culture of state government – to make it more accessible, more responsive, more transparent, and more user-friendly to all the people of Massachusetts.

A. Bringing People Back Into the Government

“This kind of open process, listening process, is a wonderful NEW beginning and an idea worth continuing in some way throughout the administration’s tenure. The notion that our freely elected government works for us is powerful one. But the premise that it works with and through us, by soliciting our ideas and concerns on an ongoing basis, is an incredibly sustaining and inspirational idea.” -- Arthur Finstein, transition website comment

One of the signature themes of the Deval Patrick campaign was asking people who have “checked out” to “check back in.” We believe that the new administration should make that theme a top priority for governance as well. Here are some ideas on how the new administration can accomplish that goal.

1. Improving responsiveness to public input

Every administration in recent Massachusetts history has had a variety of ways in which the public can communicate with the Governor’s office and with state agencies. The problem has been that such communications rarely seem to have an impact, and often lead to frustration when responses are slow or not forthcoming at all. We believe that the new administration has an extraordinary opportunity to make Massachusetts a national leader in responsive government by inculcating into state government the culture of active listening and user-friendly responsiveness that characterized the campaign.

a) Rename, overhaul, and raise the profile of the Governor’s Office of External Relations

“The administration needs one or more staff people whose role is to be a liaison between the cabinet, the directors of departments and the people in local communities…. The liaison’s role would be to foster citizens’ participation in civic life by creating vehicles for public discourse on a regular basis. The liaison would help to keep the administration and the public connected, so that the public continues to feel as
The Governor’s Office of External Relations (“OER”) has traditionally handled constituent input. But it has generally toiled in obscurity and has not been seen as having a significant impact on policy. We believe that, since OER already has at least some machinery in place to handle input from the public, it is a good starting point for building an office to handle civic engagement. However, a major overhaul of OER is needed. To begin with, the office should be renamed. “External Relations” sends exactly the wrong message – input from the public should not be deemed “external” to the workings of government; it should be integral to them.

Accordingly, we recommend that OER be renamed the Office of Civic Engagement (“OCE”), and that its director report directly to the Governor. This office should be given the staffing and technological resources it needs to make feasible meaningful responses to public input within a reasonably short period of time. One of the reasons for the Deval Patrick campaign’s impressive success at keeping its volunteers engaged was its rapid response time for inquiries: 24 hours to acknowledge, and 7 days for a substantive response, in most cases. We leave it to the new administration to determine what the appropriate response times should be going forward, but we recommend that a similar schedule of response times for acknowledgements and substantive responses to public input should be set and enforced.

In many cases, inquiries directed to the Governor’s office will be more appropriately addressed by a state agency than by the Governor’s staff. OCE therefore should serve as a liaison between the public and the bureaucracy of state government, and should be responsible both for routing inquiries to the appropriate agency and for following up to ensure that the agency has responded in a timely manner. In addition, OCE should serve as a clearinghouse for best practices among government agencies, and should make itself available to assist agencies in bringing their practices with respect to public input up to date and into compliance with the new administration’s agenda.

For this idea to work, the Governor must make it a priority. Therefore, we recommend that the Governor emphasize civic engagement generally, and the work of OCE specifically, within the administration, and that he instruct all secretariat and agency heads to work directly with OCE to improve their agencies’ ability to respond to public input.

b) Technological improvements

Technology can play a central role in making it easier for people to check back into their government. A newly-invigorated Office of Civic Engagement can and should use technology to improve government’s ability to receive, and to respond quickly and effectively to, public input. The use of technology to enhance civic engagement should be a major priority for the state’s new Chief Information Officer. We offer a few specific suggestions on this topic; the Technology Working Group will be addressing this issue in detail, and has greater expertise in this area, so in general we will defer to them.
(1) Overhaul of Mass.gov
Mass.gov, the official state website, is in general not terribly user-friendly. Many other states have far superior websites that offer much better access and services to internet users – for example, online transactions should not be organized by agency, since users may not know which state agency to look up; a system of email alerts or RSS feeds could keep users who sign up for specific notifications informed about bills coming up for hearing or other matters of interest; and hearings and other public meetings could be streamed live over the internet and later posted as podcasts and written transcripts. Also, any state’s website should feature “citizen toolkits” containing basic information on legislative procedure, the budget, contacting state government, and similar matters. Studies have been released by Brown University, the National Policy Research Council, and no doubt others, comparing state websites and gathering best practices. We recommend that an overhaul of Mass.gov be made a priority for the state’s Chief Information Officer.

(2) 311 line
New York City’s remarkable success with its “311” line, in which anyone can dial 311 and reach a call center to report a pothole or other problem requiring non-emergency attention should be investigated and, if possible, emulated. We recognize that setting up 311 service would be a costly and complex endeavor, so this is a topic for investigation and, hopefully, future implementation. A similar idea, which would be part of the Mass.gov overhaul, is a one-stop internet portal to report problems in need of government attention, including a way of checking on what progress has been made.

(3) Internet-based public input
The state’s CIO should investigate the possibilities of providing input via the internet on pending issues or executive branch hearings, legislation (in consultation with the Speaker’s and Senate President’s offices), and other matters as to which, at present, the only way to participate is to appear in person. Electronic options for participation would expand tremendously the universe of Massachusetts residents who are able to make their voices heard.

(4) Budget transparency
We understand that the Budget and Finance Working Group will be proposing specific ways of making the budget more comprehensible and the budget process more accessible. We want to underscore the importance of making budget transparency a priority, and we expect that technology will play a significant role in attaining that goal. No other state document or legislation has such immediate and widespread impact on the lives of Massachusetts residents, and a recurring theme in our public input was the desire for more transparency in the budget process. We also hope that the administration might work with municipal officials to help them bring similar transparency to local budgets.

2. State House culture
“...She was made to cry in front of the committee.... She had to come all the way into Boston and wait there for five hours while all of the paid lobbyists and elected officials spoke before her, and finally when she gets to speak, she’s cut off. First she’s told she...”

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can't speak in Spanish; second, told that what she has to say is irrelevant; and third, told that she's cut off after two minutes because of the Spanish translation that she can't finish. That's just an example, and that's the worst story. I mean, that's like our famous horror story, but that is not too far off the mark of what very frequently happens when regular people who most need good government have the least access to it.” --Liz Jackson, Lawrence public meeting, 12/11/06

We heard many testimonials at our public meetings, and received many written comments, describing the ordeal of testifying at the State House. Particularly for people who live some distance from Boston, the process can be a nightmare. Hearing rooms may be small and difficult to find; panelists frequently disappear from the panel; and “regular people” who wish to speak often must wait for hours while legislators, other elected and executive branch officials, and “experts” are allowed to testify first. We heard stories of people who boarded buses and traveled for miles to attend a State House hearing, only to head home hours later without having been heard. Experiences like these can only discourage people from participating in their government.

Almost more than anything else at our public meetings, we heard that people desperately want to be listened to, and to be treated with respect, when they have something to say to their government. It is, of course, outside the Governor’s purview to reform the way legislative hearings are managed. However, we believe that the new administration can lead by example in this area, such that when executive branch hearings are held, attendees from all walks of life are treated respectfully. At a minimum, we recommend curbing the practice of allowing elected officials and other selected witnesses to testify ahead of “regular people,” and we urge all members of any panel hearing testimony to remain for the duration of the hearing.

3. Expanding Participation in Elections

“I think when people are trying to step onto the ladder of getting engaged, we can make sure that the bottom rung is firm, and strong, and easy to step on and get you started.”
--Avi Green, Millbury public meeting, 12/5/06.

Voting is the most basic form – the “bottom rung” – of checking into civic life. There is no more fundamental pathway to civic engagement than the elections process. A priority of any effort to increase civic engagement must be to assess the conduct of elections and to take the steps necessary to remove barriers to voting and voter registration.

At the outset of this discussion, however, we note that the Secretary of the Commonwealth has a major role to play, and considerable expertise, in the administration of elections. We recommend that Secretary Galvin be consulted on all aspects of any plan to advocate for elections reforms, and that wherever possible he be directly involved in the administration’s efforts in this regard.

a) Election-day registration

“I wanted to tell you a brief story from election day. I was in Chelsea, at the Saint Rose church, which is a big polling place in Chelsea, and a Latino woman came in. She was so excited. She had just recently become a citizen, which she had worked on for over a decade. She was really just incredibly excited. She came in, and she said, ‘I'm here --
I'm here to vote,' and she wasn't registered. She had filled in a form, but maybe she filled it in incorrectly, or there had been a confusion about her last name because sometimes Spanish names, you know, it's the middle name and the last name, and they use it differently than it's commonly done here in the states. They couldn't find her on the list. So, her first experience of trying to vote in the United States was going home, disappointed.” --Avi Green, Millbury public meeting, 12/5/06.

Perhaps more than any other election-related issue, we have heard numerous calls at our public meetings and in written comments for election-day registration. At present, a Massachusetts voter must be registered 20 days in advance of a primary or general election in order to vote. The effect of this rule is frequently that citizens who are otherwise eligible to vote, and who wish to do so, are denied the opportunity to exercise the franchise. The impact is greatest on voters who are newly eligible, transient, and minorities. The cost of implementing election-day registration is estimated by MassVOTE (a leading advocacy organization in this area) to be relatively modest – approximately $250 per precinct, or less than $1 million for the state. Seven states (ID, ME, MN, MT, NH, WI, and WY) already have election-day registration in place, and Massachusetts voting rights organizations report that it has worked well in those states, boosting turnout by an estimated 12% over states without this reform.

No single election reform offers as much promise to increase voter participation as this one. Secretary Galvin has announced that he supports election-day registration, and we recommend that the new administration join Secretary Galvin in urging the legislature to make election-day registration a reality in Massachusetts.

b) Welcoming all voters to the polls

"I'm what we call a legislative advocate for the disability community.... We vote at less than ten percent. Our voting is very spotty, because there are still places in the commonwealth where we still can't get in. We found at this election that the new electronic voting doesn't work. There still needs to be so much work for my community to participate." --Barb White, Millbury public meeting, 12/5/06.

Our public meetings and comments revealed considerable dissatisfaction with the actual process of going to the polls and voting, ranging from inconsistently- and inappropriately-applied ID requirements, to inadequate facilities for disabled voters, to polling stations closing early, to polling places running out of ballots. Some of these problems arise because of insufficient poll worker training or other issues at the local level; others require legislative or other state-level solutions.

In concert with Secretary Galvin, the new administration can and should elevate the public profile of issues surrounding the election process. One way to do so might be to convene, jointly with the Secretary of State, an election “summit” to which local elections officials and other stakeholders would be invited, and at which attendees would hear from the Governor and Secretary about their priorities for improving the administration of elections, and would have the opportunity to discuss best practices. Some specific issues of concern to voting rights advocates include:
(1) Language issues: ballots and census cards

A basic foundation of voting rights is that citizens eligible to vote be able to read their ballots. As has been widely reported, several Massachusetts cities have recently been under federal investigation for potential voting rights violations relating to language issues. The Governor should work with the Secretary to ensure that these problems continue moving toward a prompt, satisfactory resolution.

Non-English speakers also face challenges keeping themselves on the voting lists because of a state law (unique to Massachusetts) that requires voters to return a census card every year or be deemed “inactive” and potentially stricken from the voter registration rolls. We recommend both that the new administration consider supporting legislation that relaxes the “census card” requirement, and that in the meantime, it encourage broader use of non-English census cards.

(2) Access for the disabled

As the press has reported, Massachusetts has failed to meet the federal Help America Vote Act’s requirement that voting machines suitable for use by disabled voters be in place statewide by the 2006 elections. Denying disabled voters the ability to vote simply because of their disability is not acceptable, and the new administration should insist that Massachusetts be brought into compliance with HAVA as soon as possible.

Relatedly, we heard a good deal of testimony at public meetings and in writing about which voting machines should be introduced into Massachusetts. To date, the Secretary has declined to approve any machines that do not provide a paper trail; nonetheless, the approval of machines to assist disabled voters is an open issue, and concerns about non-verifiable direct registering electronic (DRE) machines is increasingly widespread. We agree with the great majority of witnesses who testified on this subject that electronic machines that do not include a voter-verifiable paper trail should not be introduced in Massachusetts. The most promising electronic voting machines are those that, after verifying the voter’s selections on the screen, print out a correctly-marked optical-scan ballot that is then recorded in the same way as other optical-scan ballots.

(3) Documentation requirements

Identification requirements at polling places are enforced inconsistently, and unfortunately are often enforced more harshly against members of ethnic or language minority groups. Every polling place should post clear guidelines as to when IDs are required and when they are not, and as to what forms of ID are acceptable. Poll workers should be trained to apply these guidelines consistently.

(4) Recruitment and training of poll workers

The average age of poll workers in the United States is 72, according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (we are unaware of any state-specific data). Older poll workers may be unfamiliar with the operation of electronic voting machines and computerized voting lists, and may find it physically difficult to staff the polls for 13 consecutive hours. One way to address these issues is to encourage and recruit young people – even those
too young to vote\(^1\) – to assist at the polls. This suggestion serves two purposes: it will offer support to older poll workers in critical areas, and it will directly involve young people in the voting process, a crucial aspect of civic engagement.

c) Expanded voting opportunities and outreach
As important as improving the voting experience is ensuring that citizens who are eligible to vote are registered and do in fact vote. Other states have implemented a number of reform measures, including no-fault absentee voting, early voting, and an election-day holiday, designed to increase participation. We urge the administration, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to study the success of these strategies elsewhere and to consider which of them should be implemented here. We also offer the following suggestions for improving the current system:

(1) Absentee voting
Too many disabled citizens and others who cannot get to the polls do not avail themselves of the opportunity to vote by absentee ballot. The administration should work jointly with the Secretary and with non-governmental organizations such as AARP and disability groups to increase awareness of the absentee voting option.

(2) Youth outreach
Unfortunately, young people register and vote in lower percentages than members of other age groups. Excellent work on youth registration is already being done by non-governmental groups like Neighbor to Neighbor, Dunk the Vote, Oiste, and MassVOTE, to name just a few. The administration should find ways to promote and support the work of these organizations in encouraging newly-eligible voters to register.

(3) Non-statewide elections
Many important elections, including most municipal elections and special elections to fill vacant legislative seats, are not held on the same dates as statewide elections. These elections generally suffer from extremely low turnout. The administration should find ways to assist the Secretary of State in promoting awareness of these elections, perhaps including outreach via the state website and the campaign’s volunteer organization.

4. Public Advisory Groups
"I would humbly like to suggest the continuation of the campaign idea that people can become involved and help formulate change and progress via periodic, regular, informal ‘town meetings’ directly with the people throughout the Commonwealth with a number of goals in mind." --Cesar Archilla, transition website comment

"I think such groups would be the ultimate representation of the grassroots in politics. It certainly would be a way to keep the citizen base active in politics and bring forward fresh, new ideas, as well as present problems at the state level that exist too far out of

\(^1\) A recently-enacted law allows 16- and 17-year-olds to serve as poll workers if certain conditions are met. See G.L. c. 54, § 11B.
The idea of public advisory groups on important issues surfaced in several different forms, both in our public meetings and from written comments. Many felt strongly that these councils would be a particularly effective way for the new administration to demonstrate its intention to convert the grassroots into a strategy for governance. A well-designed system of public advisory groups has the potential to be an extraordinary, and potentially groundbreaking, means of bringing the grassroots into the governance process.

If the new administration decides to adopt this suggestion, we recommend that the Governor and Lt. Governor decide the subject areas in which they wish to convene people’s advisory groups, and then task the appropriate agency heads with determining, in consultation with the Office of Civic Engagement, how to structure the groups. We would note that the groups’ membership should (1) be broadly representative and diverse; (2) avoid the “usual suspects” problem (i.e., the phenomenon of the same dozen or so “experts” appearing on multiple government commissions); and (3) be of manageable size, yet not be so small as to seem exclusive. To that end, we recommend that among the options for how to structure these groups, random composition should be considered. Creating a group by randomly selecting its members from within a certain community may not be appropriate in every case, but in some cases it may be a worthwhile experiment.

Public advisory groups, once set up, should be given considerable autonomy to choose their own leadership, to set meeting schedules, and to conduct their business. However, groups should be required to make some if not all of their meetings public and to receive input from the community, following the model of the Transition Working Groups and the guidelines for public meetings set forth above (i.e., treating all members of the public respectfully). Agency heads should attend meetings of the groups in their subject areas periodically, and the Governor and Lt. Governor should occasionally attend as well.

We recognize that implementation of this proposal will be challenging. But we also believe that it carries a great deal of promise, and that the experiment is worth trying.

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2 It should be noted that some seemingly random ways of structuring these groups pose significant problems – for example, voter registration lists exclude unregistered citizens and also exclude all non-citizens, while telephone listings exclude residents who use cell phones rather than a land line.

3 A recent poll commissioned by the New America Foundation shows support for one such experiment that was successfully undertaken in Canada: “The support for citizen recommendations was also reflected in the reaction to a citizen-based reform model that was used recently in British Columbia (Canada). Nearly 73% of respondents said California should repeat the British Columbia model, where 160 voters were randomly selected to participate in a year-long evaluation of their democracy. At the conclusion, the recommendations of the panel – known as a Citizens Assembly – were placed on the ballot for all voters to decide.”
B. Taking the Government to the People

“We feel very far from the eye, heart and soul of the Governor (or State House, for that matter). Deval Patrick built his campaign from the grassroots, ground up. Now we would like to see Patrick continue his grassroots connection and organizing by showing he is committed to having a continuing presence and listening connection to and in [the South Coast] area, an area in deep economic turmoil for many years.” --Crystal Campbell, transition website comment

Many people think of Massachusetts government as Boston generally, and the State House specifically. That message shuts out large portions of the state – especially communities that are socially, economically, or geographically outside the mainstream of greater Boston – from feeling that the government is accessible to and represents them. In our working group’s public meetings, we heard repeatedly, and emphatically, how much it meant to residents of the communities we visited that members of the Transition Team were coming to them, instead of making them come to us. We think it important for the new administration to continue that practice. We note that, for all the public meetings discussed below, the administration should involve legislators and local officials who represent the areas in which the meetings are being held.

1. Regional Public Meetings with the Governor and Lt. Governor

“I would suggest regular town meetings (whether day or night) to all corners of the state getting input from the ‘silent majority’ on the new healthcare legislation, their needs re: education, etc.... The only way people are going to feel connected to their state government is to ‘reach out and touch them’ either verbally or physically. The information you glean from these meetings will give you a pulse of how the entire state you are governing is feeling as you go forward with your well-intentioned changes. Make the people really feel connected to their government – one town at a time.” --Meredith Keane, transition website comment

At every public meeting we held, and in numerous written comments, we heard over and over again how important it was during the campaign that candidate Deval Patrick went out into the communities and listened. The sense among the members of the public from whom we heard, and from the working group, is that Governor Patrick and Lt. Governor Murray need to continue the process of reaching out to the people of Massachusetts where they live, and hearing their concerns directly from them.

We therefore propose that the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor commit to holding a set number of regional public meetings every year. Perhaps monthly, perhaps quarterly, perhaps once a year in each county; we leave the specific details to be worked out by the administration. We think it important for the meetings to be held in different regions of the state, and at times when working people can attend (probably evenings or weekends).

We envision these meetings as opportunities for members of the public to interface directly with their Governor and Lt. Governor. As models, we’d suggest the late Congressman Gerry Studds, who held public meetings in every town in his district every
year while he was in office, and Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.), who holds “Listening Sessions” in each of Wisconsin’s 72 counties every year.

The public meeting format is not perfect. There is a limited amount of time for people to speak (so time limits must be vigorously enforced, and even then it is possible that not everyone who wants to speak can be heard); and unless the meetings are limited to a specific topic (which might be an approach worth trying), a wide range of subjects is likely to be discussed, so the meeting may seem unfocused. Nonetheless, we believe that the importance of the Governor and Lt. Governor reaching out directly to the people transcends the drawbacks of the public meeting format, and we urge the new administration to try it.

2. Issue-specific public meetings with Secretaries and agency heads

As discussed above, opportunities for the public to interface directly with the Governor and Lt. Governor are important. But we think the concept should be extended well beyond the state’s top two elected officials. Often the heads of secretariats and agencies will be best positioned to address specific issues and concerns.

Accordingly, we recommend that the Governor and Lt. Governor make public outreach a high priority for their Cabinet Secretaries and agency heads. These officials should be committed to holding regular public meetings in various regions of the state to discuss issues within their jurisdictions, and more generally should be committed to soliciting ideas and feedback directly from the public. Cabinet Secretaries and agency heads should be held accountable for the extent and efficacy of their outreach efforts, which should be comprehensive enough to ensure that word of these meetings extends beyond those already in close touch with the government. Technology, such as on-line forums and interactive webcasts, may have a useful role to play both in publicizing and in conducting these meetings.

3. Energize and empower state employees

State employees are often unfairly demonized in the press and elsewhere. This devalues public service and demoralizes public employees. Yet many state employees are truly dedicated public servants, and many possess an untapped wealth of knowledge on issues

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4 “The most important part of [Studds’] Civic Engagement work was his town meetings. He visited every town in his district at least once a year. These meetings were advertised locally, held in a local place of importance (the Plympton General Store, the Pembroke Library) and allowed all citizens to directly question the Congressman. Some of the most interesting discussions on the Vietnam War took place during these meetings. They were the essence of Civic Engagement.” --Stephen Shaw, transition website comment.

5 Senator Feingold describes his “Listening Sessions” as “one of the most rewarding parts of my job.” Details on his Listening Sessions are available at his website:
http://feingold.senate.gov/listening/index.html

6 Ample precedent exists for community meetings of this kind. Sen. Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville), for instance, has held a series of public meetings in her district on issues like the budget and health care, and during the process leading up to the education reform legislation in the 1990s, dozens of community meetings were held across the state.
that people care about. Governor Patrick could help boost the morale in state government simply by visiting One Ashburton Place and other government office buildings around the state and meeting as many rank-and-file employees as he can. In addition, we propose the following initiatives to help state employees become ambassadors in their own communities.

a) Utilize state employees’ expertise
As noted above, we recommend that secretaries and agency heads hold regular community meetings around the state on topics within their expertise. We further recommend that the secretary or agency head bring experts to each meeting from the ranks of relevant agencies who can speak knowledgeably on topics of interest to people in the community. For example, a hearing held by the Commissioner of DEP could include DEP employees who are expert in the area of river protection, or wetlands management, or other areas likely to be of interest to the community in which the meeting is being held.

There may also be occasions on which a community group wishes to invite a knowledgeable state employee to discuss issues of concern. We recommend that each agency assemble and publicize a “speakers bureau,” i.e., a list of state employees who are interested and available to speak to the public on specific topics. These strategies will serve the salutary purposes of improving state employee morale, and of bringing communities into closer touch with their government.

b) Encourage and expand state employee volunteering opportunities
“I believe there are other state workers who, like me, want a part in volunteering, but neither the mentoring nor the school volunteering is a good fit.” --Donna Quinn, transition website comment

At present, state law (G.L. c. 29, § 31E) permits state employees to volunteer during working hours for up to 8 hours each month. However, we have heard that this program is underutilized both because it is not well known, and because it applies only to a limited range of volunteer activities (the program is limited to assisting with a student’s or school’s educational program). To further the cause of state employee voluntarism, we recommend that the Governor both encourage state employees to avail themselves of this benefit, which will bring more state employees into communities providing valuable services, and file or support legislation to expand the program to encompass other community service activities.

4. Frequent radio and cable TV addresses
Although the President of the U.S. and Governors of other states (Michigan and California, for example) deliver regular (usually weekly) addresses via radio and other media, Massachusetts Governors have not done so. Regular addresses broadcast over mass media are an excellent and low-cost way to reach out directly to the people of Massachusetts. We therefore recommend that Governor Patrick broadcast a weekly
**radio address**, and that all such addresses be made available as podcasts on the Mass.gov website.

"My suggestion is for Deval to produce a monthly PEG access program (perhaps 30-60 min in length), to be carried on all access stations across the Commonwealth. Perhaps at the same time/date on each station. No governor has before used this resource, but it would be a great one for the people to have." --Shawn Serre, transition website comment

Like Mr. Serre, we think that local public, educational and government access (PEG) cable TV is an important resource that can serve a powerful civic engagement function. Although the specific means of supporting PEG TV falls more within the Technology Working Group’s purview, we recommend that in addition to recording weekly radio addresses, **Governor Patrick should periodically tape TV addresses** and release them to government access cable. These programs, which could be either video of addresses given before live audiences or taped in the Governor’s office, would provide yet another way to reach people directly, and also would serve to boost the profile of local access TV stations.

5. **Regional Offices**

"Why not engage the residents of Massachusetts where they live, they work, and they vote by setting up ‘Little State Houses’ across the Commonwealth?"  --Terence Noonan, transition website comment.

While periodic meetings away from Beacon Hill would serve a valuable function, they are not a substitute for a regular, sustained presence in a community. The extraordinary success of former Mayor Kevin White’s “Little City Halls” and the Patrick campaign’s Grove Hall office shows how much a truly local facility can mean to a community.

We therefore recommend that the Governor **consider opening satellite offices** in areas like Springfield, Worcester, New Bedford, Lawrence, and other areas of the state that feel a long way from Beacon Hill. Staffing requirements would be modest; these offices need not be full-service operations. We recognize, however, that this recommendation carries budgetary implications, so we consider this suggestion a medium- to long-term goal, to be considered among other spending priorities.

6. **Technological improvements**

"We have a really great tool in the world wide web to make government more accessible to at least a certain group of people. I think there is a significant ‘digital divide,’ and Mayor Menino and some other folks have been talking about ways of spanning that gap. That's a significant issue that obviously needs to be looked at. But one very easy way of addressing and making government more accessible to a lot of people is by using the Internet.”  --Pam Wilmot, Millbury public meeting (12/5/06)

Using technology to improve the transparency of government was raised at every public meeting we held, and was also the subject of numerous written comments. As noted earlier, the Technology Working Group will no doubt be addressing issues like these in greater detail, so again we will present only a few ideas on this important topic.
a) All libraries should have broadband internet access

One problem with relying on the internet to improve government transparency is that not everyone has internet access. Libraries can help solve this problem, since most public libraries in Massachusetts have high-speed internet access available for free use by their patrons. However, although in this day and age internet access should be as basic to libraries as a good book collection, not every public library has high-speed internet. We recommend that the Governor ask the Board of Library Commissioners to investigate and report on the state and extent of internet access in public libraries, and to develop a plan to ensure that all libraries have high-speed internet access, as well as to pursue federal Universal E-Rate funding for discount internet access.

In addition to the general benefits of publicly-available internet, we think that libraries with high-speed internet can serve as a government access point for people who cannot travel to the State House for important events and who lack personal internet access. Particularly if greater use is made of webcasting (as described below), libraries could become important community centers at which people across the state can meet, discuss issues of common concern, and keep in touch with what their government is doing.

b) Webcasting important State House hearings and other events

The Supreme Judicial Court, in a pilot program with Suffolk University, webcasts its oral arguments, allowing arguments to be viewed by far more people than can fit in its courtroom and making the judicial branch of government far more accessible than ever before. We see no reason why the executive and legislative branches could not duplicate this approach for hearings or other events of general interest. Accordingly, we recommend that the administration explore a pilot program of webcasting important announcements and events, and work with the Speaker and Senate President to encourage the legislature to do the same for hearings on bills of interest to the general public.

c) Blogging

“A blog for every department! With comments! Amazing idea. An almost terrifying level of citizen engagement and responsiveness. And if you don't fix that pothole ... somebody will be back for more ...” --Charley Blandy, comment on BlueMassGroup.com

As a technological matter, it would be easy and virtually costless for the Governor, the Lt. Governor, and every agency head to set up a blog on which they could post regularly, and on which the public could respond; this idea was mentioned in a number of comments from the transition website and on BlueMassGroup.com. However, any blog on which the public could comment directly would need to be carefully managed in order to avoid its being hijacked by special interest groups, to avoid offensive or inappropriate material being posted, and generally to ensure that the discussion remained constructive and respectful. We recommend that the Office of Civic Engagement and the state CIO jointly investigate the possibility of blogging by the Governor, Lt. Governor, and
agency heads, and recommend to the Governor how this exciting but challenging new media technique might improve civic engagement.

II. Encouraging and Expanding Opportunities for Service

“Let’s create a new enthusiasm throughout our Commonwealth for one of the most fundamental of American traditions – neighbors helping neighbors. And let's be sure Massachusetts is on the vanguard of the growing national movement to transform America through volunteering and civic action.” --Patrice Keegan, transition website comment

There is no greater vehicle for effecting the kinds of positive change of which Deval Patrick spoke during the campaign than community service. Service is capable of uniting diverse constituencies to transform their neighborhoods, towns, cities and state and inspire others to action as, together, they become leaders for the common good.

Below are several ideas for “Serve Massachusetts” – a broad initiative to spark the civic pride of Massachusetts residents and make the Commonwealth the premiere state in the nation for civic engagement, community service and volunteerism.

A. Raise the profile of, and serve by example in, existing service opportunities

“In the rush to brand and think about what you're going to talk about in the next election, there is a pressure to create new initiatives rather than invest in the infrastructure and the ideas that are already out there. I think if there is a way that this administration can ... forc[e] itself to think about how to leverage what’s already out there, it can liaise with the nonprofits in a powerful way.” --David Shapiro, Roxbury public meeting (12/6/06)

Our working group was extremely impressed by the extraordinary array of service-related organizations already operating in Massachusetts. We believe that one of the greatest contributions the new administration can make is to use the Governor’s bully pulpit to raise the profile of these organizations, and to encourage the people of Massachusetts to find the time to connect with them.

1. Convene a summit on the state of community service in Massachusetts within the first 100 days of the Patrick/Murray administration.

Governor Patrick could build on our state’s powerful tradition of service and volunteerism, and signal his commitment to the cause of strengthening that tradition, by convening a summit of leaders in the corporate, nonprofit, and faith-based service communities that reviews where we stand, celebrates the achievements of the field, and sets goals for the next four years. Following the summit, the administration should publish an annual “state of service” report detailing progress made toward the goals set at the summit.
2. **Engage Governor Patrick, Lt. Governor Murray, and the Cabinet Secretaries personally in community service**

Governor Patrick will be in a unique position to motivate others to serve. Performing regular service will demonstrate the Governor’s own commitment to service and inform the public policy process. The Governor could welcome the public to join him to complete projects that address critical issues, such as education, recreation, elder care and domestic and youth violence. Additionally, as already noted, the Governor could challenge all state employees to take advantage of their volunteer benefit under the State Employees Responding as Volunteers in Children’s Education Program and ask them to join him in serving the Commonwealth.

3. **Consider supporting Senators Pacheco’s “Commonwealth Citizen Service Initiative” legislation**

Sen. Marc Pacheco (D-Taunton) and retiring Sen. Brian Lees (R-E. Longmeadow) have sponsored comprehensive legislation, the “Commonwealth Citizen Service Initiative,” that would advance the cause of community service and volunteering in several important respects. Among other things, the bill, which is supported by a broad array of service organizations and educational institutions, would streamline the state’s mechanism for coordinating and promoting service by codifying in statute the Massachusetts Service Alliance (which presently serves by Executive Order as the state’s central for service organizations, as noted above), and would expand the use of service-learning projects in public schools. We recommend that the new administration work with Senator Pacheco to help enact this legislation.

4. **Enhance and promote the “Connect and Serve” web portal as part of a Mass.gov overhaul**

The internet is the tool of choice for 21st century social networking, allowing individuals to seek out others who share common interests easily. The Massachusetts Service Alliance, which serves by Executive Order as the State Commission on Service and Volunteerism, recently inaugurated a web portal called “Connect and Serve” (www.mass.gov/connectandserve), which connects people wishing to volunteer with appropriate service organizations. Part of the Mass.gov overhaul discussed above should be to boost the visibility and improve the functionality of Connect and Serve. The Governor could also publicly call for more organizations to register with the site, thereby increasing service opportunities, and for more individuals to use it.

5. **Promote the use of public libraries as a hub for increased civic engagement**

Public libraries are an excellent existing resource for civic engagement, and the new administration could do much to promote their use to that end. We propose investigating three specific initiatives to turn public libraries into community centers for civic engagement. Each of these ideas would need further development, perhaps by the Board of Library Commissioners in conjunction with the new Office of Civic Engagement.
a) Neighborhood book groups
Libraries could serve as a gathering place for neighborhood book group discussions in conjunction with efforts to get residents in a given neighborhood or town to all read the same book. This has been done in Chicago on a large scale, by Oprah, and some members of our group believed that some MA communities have begun to do this as well.

b) Welcome Wagon
Libraries could serve as a venue for monthly pot-luck suppers as part of a new Welcome Wagon program to welcome new residents to the town or neighborhood – this idea generated a great deal of enthusiasm in our Working Group’s discussions. The idea is for towns, neighborhood associations, and non-profit organizations to organize a Welcome Wagon initiative such that, whenever a new resident moves to the town, a volunteer knocks on the new resident’s door to welcome them to the community, to share information on local services and resources (crime watch, civic events, government resources) and also to invite them to a monthly pot-luck gathering at the library where residents will get a chance to socialize, to meet with representatives of local and state government, and to learn of other local initiatives.

c) A venue for community service
Libraries can serve as a venue for community service projects, including tutoring of students seeking help with the MCAS and adults learning English as well as other service efforts such as students teaching seniors how to navigate the internet and do genealogical research.

6. Establish a "Governor's Student Service Award" and a "Serve Massachusetts Community Service Contest" to recognize the idealism of young people.
Another way for the Governor to raise the profile of community service is to sponsor a series of awards, in addition to the existing Governor's Points of Light Awards. The Governor's Student Service Award, modeled after the Presidential Student Service Award, would recognize every young person in Massachusetts who achieves a certain standard, measured by their total volunteer hours over the course of the year. The Massachusetts Community Service Contest would provide an opportunity for young people who plan, implement and document service projects to compete and share best practices with their peers at local, regional and state levels. Projects could be submitted, reviewed and shared on the state website, creating an online bank of service blueprints for anyone to download and replicate. To complete the recognition of the continuum of service, we recommend the establishment of a Corporate Service Award to highlight corporations committed to service and volunteerism.
B. Create a 1,000-person "Commonwealth Corps" to give Massachusetts residents the opportunity to serve their communities full-time.

Massachusetts can address its most urgent challenges and reinvigorate its civic life by creating a Commonwealth Corps, 1,000 members strong. Commonwealth Corps members will serve in schools, nonprofits, and municipal agencies, and will mobilize and lead 100,000+ volunteers in high-impact local projects.

The Commonwealth Corps will unleash the tremendous potential of voluntarism to transform the lives of those who serve and those who are served. It will also create and strengthen the bonds of common purpose that can unite our communities and help bridge barriers of race, class, age, language, and education. By establishing a new paradigm for large-scale, locally-managed service, Massachusetts can lead the nation to renew its civic vitality and fulfill its boldest aspirations.

The Commonwealth Corps members would serve one-year terms. The Corps would consist of approximately 500 full-time members, most of whom would be recent college graduates, and 500 part-time members, many of whom would be older adults and retirees. Commonwealth Corps members would be placed with nonprofit organizations and public entities (including schools) across the state, and would undertake projects from teaching citizenship classes for immigrants wishing to become citizens to rebuilding damaged homes in communities across the state. The entities would submit proposals through a competitive grant process and Corps member slots would be awarded to those entities with the highest-quality plans for engaging Corps members and the volunteers they attract. This proposal is estimated to cost $10-15 million annually.

C. Encourage service-learning in schools and colleges

"Service learning is part of a process of character development in youth – not only do they gain the skills needed to meet the challenges of our society, they gain a feeling of empowerment and connection with the community." --Christine Ellersick, transition website comment

We heard tremendous support, both in our public meetings and in written testimony, for service-learning in the Commonwealth’s public schools. Educators, parents, and students who have been involved with service-learning uniformly spoke in glowing terms about its power to instill an understanding of the value of community service in young people.

1. Support establishing Community Service-Learning as an integral part of K-12 curricula in Massachusetts.

"As a member on the Community Service Learning Board, I have learned more than I ever imagined I would when I first joined this group two years ago. From spending time actually taking part in a project, such as mentoring sixth grade students, to running a meeting comprised of both students and adults, I have learned the importance of everyone's role in a community, and how just one person's vision can make one huge difference, no matter their grade or age, especially when we work together. For all students on the board, it serves as a training ground for involvement in civic affairs. We have developed confidence in speaking for what we feel passionately about, and we know that our opinions matter. For the students who participate in projects, it serves as
a training ground for the sense of service to others that has become an inherent part of education.” --Kayla Bergstrom (high school senior), Millbury public meeting (12/5/06)

Service-learning integrates community service with academic learning. In well-designed service-learning programs, service in the school and community is used to enrich and extend classroom learning by providing students with opportunities to apply academic skills in real-world settings and to make connections between academic content and everyday issues and concerns.

Presently throughout the state there are communities that have established service-learning youth councils. These councils are student directed, but require participation of adults from local government and community organizations. Together students and citizens plan and implement projects that improve the community and contribute to the common good. Expansion of these councils can be a cost effective, yet powerful vehicle to increase youth engagement throughout the state.

2. Challenge the state’s universities and colleges to implement “Serve Study”

Without any additional spending, the state government could create the opportunity for college students to serve their communities by shifting the use of Federal Work-Study funds. Historically, less than 10% of such funds are used to support college students performing community service. This is a tremendous untapped resource. The state could lead the way in engaging college students in community service by encouraging colleges and universities to increase, over four years, to 25% their total commitment of Federal Work-Study funds to “Serve Study” positions in the surrounding communities.

D. Expand civics education in schools

“Every student should receive a rigorous and enlightening education in the history, possibilities and responsibilities of American civic life. It’s the young who check out of politics and civic life; through civics education, we can help many check back in. I’d love to see our new governor visit a civics class or lead a discussion with middle school students about the importance of civic engagement.” --Abel McDonnell, transition website comment

One of the most common suggestions we received for how to improve civic engagement, both in our public meetings and from the transition website, was to require and reinvigorate civics education in schools. Young people must be given the knowledge of the ways ordinary citizens can and do create change; the skills to analyze complex issues, articulate solutions, and plan collaboratively for them; and the values and attitudes that foster civic engagement, including a commitment to democracy, a respect for others, and a sense of the greater good.

A review of the current history and social studies curricula indicates a heavy emphasis on history and geography and significantly less emphasis on civics in the required K-12 sequences. However, the framework provides a twelfth-grade elective course in American Government that contains ten strong standards for the role of citizens in the United States. Integrating these standards in a balanced way over time into the existing
required curriculum sequences would go a long way toward ensuring that formal, effective civics education becomes an integral part of our required K-12 history and social studies curricula.

E. Encourage corporate, philanthropic, and faith-based leadership to increase service and voluntarism

Deval Patrick spoke often during the campaign of his efforts while employed by large corporations to move those corporations in a socially responsible direction. We recommend that Governor Patrick continue his quest to make corporations the socially responsible citizens that they can and should be, and that this effort be expanded to include members of the philanthropic and faith communities, all of whom have much to offer in this regard.

1. Encourage CEOs and faith-based leaders to support their employees’ and members’ engaging in community service.

Creating a CEOs for Service group, which challenges Massachusetts companies with over 100 employees to provide their employees with 40 hours of paid leave time during the year to perform community service, would encourage corporate community involvement, develop best practices for corporate citizenship, and directly connect Massachusetts business leaders to the Patrick/Murray vision for corporate civic engagement. A similar effort with the faith-based community, which already is heavily engaged in community service, would both honor and elevate the profile of that community’s efforts and would encourage further involvement.

2. Challenge leading foundations, private philanthropists, and corporations to create a "Serve Massachusetts Fund"

Given limited state resources, we propose that the Governor convene leading private philanthropists and corporate leaders to create a $50 million fund, comparable to the successful Afterschool for All initiative, to provide a direct match to state resources spent promoting service and volunteerism initiatives. Many foundations are already involved in civic engagement efforts and seeing results, and the Governor could promote these accomplishments. For example, the Civic Engagement Initiative established in 2002 by the Hyams and Boston Foundations and the Access Strategies Fund, among others, seeks to increase voter engagement, voter access and civic leadership in neighborhoods and among constituencies that have historically lower voter participation.

F. More ambitious initiatives

We understand that state resources are scarce, and that there will be competing demands by worthy programs for available funds. We believe, however, that no cause is more central to Governor Patrick’s vision for Massachusetts, or to the long-term health of the people of this state, than investing in the cause of community service, which is perhaps the clearest manifestation of people seeing that they have a stake in their neighbors’ aspirations as well as their own. Therefore, recognizing that each of the following
proposals carries budgetary implications, we suggest that the following initiatives be studied and, if possible, implemented.

1. **Provide a state match to the federal AmeriCorps Education Award for members who both serve and attend college or university in Massachusetts.**

   This investment would support young people who put the values and skills they acquire from their AmeriCorps experience to work on campuses and communities across Massachusetts. Federal law set the AmeriCorps Education Award in 1993 at $4,725, and that figure has not been increased or indexed for inflation since the program’s enactment. Massachusetts has the opportunity to invest in young people by supplementing the federal Education Award in order to make higher education more affordable. The match program could be phased in over four years. Considering that there are approximately 1,300 AmeriCorps members currently serving in Massachusetts, not all of whom will seek higher education in-state, this initiative would cost less than $1.5 million in the first year. This strategy could also be linked to efforts to retain college graduates by offering increased Education Awards to graduates who commit to serve through Massachusetts AmeriCorps programs after graduation, ensuring that the long-term civic investment continues to benefit Massachusetts communities.

2. **Engage Massachusetts high school students to become "Massachusetts Summer Heroes"**

   Enabling high school students to serve their communities while earning money for college would benefit the Commonwealth and promote civic ideals. Enrolled in a "Massachusetts Summer Heroes" program, high school students would perform socially valuable, full-time community service for eight weeks during summer breaks in exchange for a small stipend of $125 per 30-hour week, plus a $1,000 education award upon completion of 240 hours of service. The "Summer Heroes" program could become a model for the nation. Administrative and staff costs would be covered by the non-profit or governmental organizations that leverage the service of Summer Heroes participants. This program might be particularly attractive to young people of color or low incomes to become involved in volunteerism and civic affairs and start them on the path to higher education. Engaging 5,000 Massachusetts high school students as Summer Heroes would cost the state $10 million in the first year.

3. **Provide high schools with a "Community Service Coach"**

   Each high school in Massachusetts could be provided with a “Community Service Coach,” a coordinator who would organize service-learning activities for students in the school. At an average of 870 students per high school, having a Community Service Coach in each of our state’s 340 high schools would facilitate nearly 300,000 students in performing service. The program could be staffed by members of Commonwealth Corps. As a stand-alone program, likely candidates for the positions would include part-time/substitute teachers and AmeriCorps alumni. The state could provide a challenge grant of $10,000 per coach, to be matched by local school districts and private sources, costing the state $3.5 million in the first year.
III. Other Issues

The above discussion does not capture every issue that we heard in our public meetings or in written comments, but it does capture most of them. Some important issues that were mentioned that do not easily fit into the above categories, yet that have a direct impact on people’s ability to participate fully in the civic life of their communities, included:

A. Public safety

Several people testified that they did not feel safe in their communities, and that civic engagement is impossible when personal safety and security is not assured. We strongly endorse this view, and we defer to the Public Safety working group on how best to address this important issue.

B. CORI reform

Several people testified that problems with the CORI law lead to people recently released from prison having a difficult time re-engaging in civic life (e.g., by finding an apartment and a job), and ending up drifting back into the same behaviors that led to incarceration in the first place. The issues surrounding CORI are outside of our group’s expertise, so we take no position on this issue, other than to note that it arose at our meetings.

C. Immigration

Some witnesses regretted the negative tone surrounding the debate on immigration, noting that it prevents immigrants from fully engaging with their neighbors. One witness noted that the highly-charged debate has resulted in a good deal of misinformation being widely disseminated, and another expressed concern about proposed new citizenship tests and greatly increased fees to become a citizen. Again, we take no position on issues of immigration policy generally. However, we strongly urge that public outreach efforts, specifically including efforts to register eligible citizens (especially new citizens) to vote, include outreach to immigrant communities. There are many outstanding non-governmental organizations already doing this work (such as the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (”MIRA”), and the Chinese Progressive Association in Chinatown), and we urge the administration to actively seek out ways to support their efforts.
APPENDIX

Transcripts of the Civic Engagement Working Group’s public meetings in Millbury, Boston, Roxbury, North Dartmouth, and Lawrence