



## *Advancing Reproductive Freedom in Your City*

# A TOOL FOR ADVOCATES

**T**HE LOCAL REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM INDEX: EVALUATING U.S. CITIES 2017 (LOCAL INDEX) is a first-of-its-kind initiative by the National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH) that evaluates the reproductive health, rights, and justice policies of the 40 most populous metropolitan areas/municipalities in the United States. As the federal government and many state legislatures continue to attack reproductive freedom, now is a pivotal time for cities to ensure that their residents and all who come there have the ability to control their reproductive and sexual lives. The Local Index can help local advocates, community leaders, elected officials, and others interested in encouraging a locality to use the full extent of its policy and programmatic powers to foster thriving families, support people's reproductive and sexual health decisions, and destigmatize abortion and contraception.

This tool provides guidance to local advocates on how to use the Local Index to develop, support, and advance policy initiatives in your city.<sup>1</sup>

## Understanding the Local Landscape

If you have not engaged in local advocacy, it is important to first identify the challenges in your city that can be addressed through public policy. You may already know exactly what needs to change to impact your community and which policies would do so. If not, it can be helpful to meet with stakeholders, such as existing coalition partners that work on the local level or new organizations that understand the city's most urgent challenges and opportunities for improvement, and to help ensure the voices of those most impacted inform your work from the very beginning.

If these groups already have existing local policy campaigns that you have capacity to support, consider together whether you could create an omnibus package for your city. Omnibus packages can unify your work with your partner organizations under a set of values or align your initiatives toward one shared goal. Omnibus packages are often popular with lawmakers and can help you forge a compelling press narrative for your campaign.

## Using the Local Index to Create a Proactive Reproductive Health Policy Agenda

The Local Index includes several components to help you choose a particular proactive reproductive health policy goal, including the Model City, City Scorecards, and policy recommendations. Review these as an organization or with a coalition of partners, and identify the policies your city does not currently have in place or those you would like to see strengthened or expanded. Ask yourselves the following questions:

*Which policies relate to the most pressing challenges in our community?*

*Which policies seem to be in line with the values of our community and coalition?*

*Which seem the most achievable?*

*Which policies have been instituted in cities similar to ours (in terms of geography, demographics, financial resources, or political makeup)?*

Once you have your list of potential policies or solutions, start to narrow it down by identifying:

*Which policies would most effectively address the needs of our city.*

*What it might take to pass the policy or policies we are zeroing in on, and what resources our coalition is able to contribute.*

*Which policies our coalition most supports.*

## Identifying Other Cities That Have Instituted Similar Policies

Use the Local Index's Comprehensive Scorecard to see which other cities have already adopted a policy you are considering. Contact NIRH staff at [localrepro@nirhealth.org](mailto:localrepro@nirhealth.org) to connect with advocates and policymakers in those cities. These allies may be able to offer guidance on how they accomplished their goals, tell you about the roadblocks they encountered along the way, and explain how they handled them. These conversations will likely be immensely helpful in your own strategic planning.

Seeing a track record of success in other cities can also be compelling to elected officials or policymakers who may be skeptical about the viability of your plans. Find out if any of the policy champions in other cities are willing to talk to your policymakers to offer encouragement and advice.



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## Engaging Policymakers

The Local Index itself can be a tool for grabbing the attention of key policymakers or community members you want to activate. How you use it will depend on a range of factors, including whether your city is included in the Local Index, whether the policy you are pursuing is addressed in the Local Index, and the tone of your campaign (e.g., whether you want to call out lawmakers for inaction or point to this as an opportunity to pass innovative policy together).

Potential strategies for educating the community about your policy include:

**Contact press or write an op-ed** about how your policy aligns with the Local Index’s narrative of the forward movement happening on the local level.

**Host an event with grassroots supporters** to talk about the Local Index and use it as context for discussing your policy and work in the community.

**Share the City Scorecard or Model City** on social media and talk about how it aligns with your campaign.

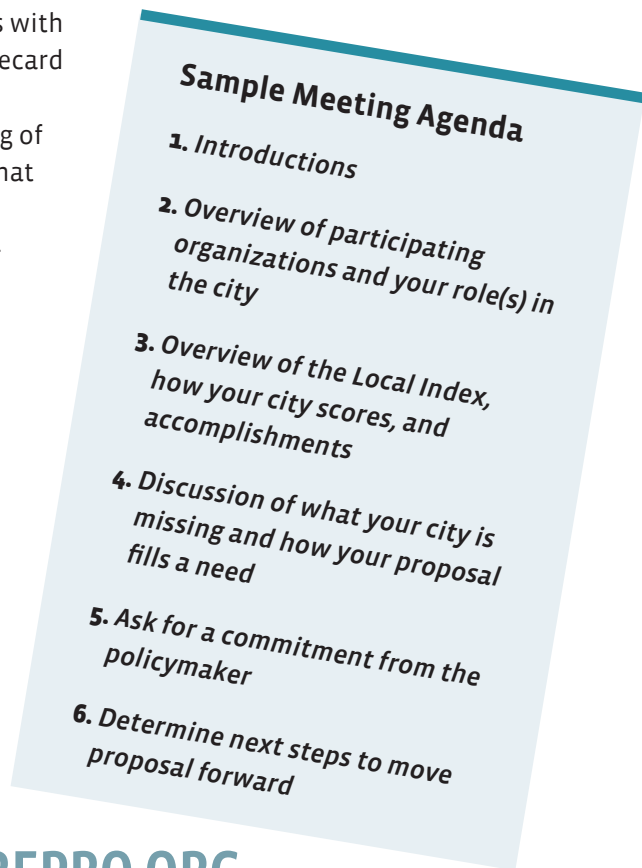
Contact NIRH staff at [localrepro@nirhealth.org](mailto:localrepro@nirhealth.org) for assistance in developing a plan that will work for your city and policy goals.

### A Step-by-Step Guide for a Policymaker Meeting in a Local Index City<sup>2</sup>

The Local Index is a powerful tool to use in meetings with lawmakers and their staff. You can use the City Scorecard or Model City to set the tone for the meeting and cultivate an elected official’s baseline understanding of pressing issues in the community and policy ideas that would have a positive impact.

**Schedule a meeting** with the elected official or their staff. If you have never done this before, see if an allied organization can make an introduction, but a cold request should still get a response, particularly if your organization has been active in the elected official’s district. When you schedule the meeting, ask who will be in the meeting and then research what work they have previously done on this issue, as well as any relevant committee positions the policymaker holds.

**Prior to the meeting**, create a legislator packet including information on your policy proposal. This may include relevant policy research; a history of your work; data on the effectiveness



**Sample Meeting Agenda**

1. *Introductions*
2. *Overview of participating organizations and your role(s) in the city*
3. *Overview of the Local Index, how your city scores, and accomplishments*
4. *Discussion of what your city is missing and how your proposal fills a need*
5. *Ask for a commitment from the policymaker*
6. *Determine next steps to move proposal forward*



of your proposal; your City Scorecard and the Model City; and the executive summary of the Local Index (contact NIRH for copies).

**Give a brief summary** of the Local Index report and explain how your city scored, using the City Scorecard as an illustration. Mention how any relevant cities scored as well (local rivals or similarly-sized cities may be good to discuss, particularly if they are doing better than your city!).

**Use the City Scorecard** to identify your accomplishments. What policies resulted from your advocacy work or that of your fellow advocates? What has the executive or legislative body you are lobbying previously enacted or considered and rejected on this issue? What is the broader picture not captured in this brief snapshot?

**Talk about what** your city is missing and how you can raise your score. Use that as an introduction to your proposal. How will what you are proposing get the city closer to embodying reproductive freedom?

**Introduce a specific ask** and ask the lawmaker to commit to specific action. That may be introducing your legislation or resolution, sponsoring a bill, commissioning a study, funding a new project, or improving implementation of an existing initiative.

## Moving Forward

Every community is different, and NIRH encourages you to adapt this tool, and the resources in the Local Index, to your community's unique culture, opportunities, and challenges. NIRH is available to provide support and technical assistance to you as needed. Contact us at [localrepro@nirhealth.org](mailto:localrepro@nirhealth.org) with questions or for individualized guidance on using the strategies or choosing policies included in these tools.

1 For guidance on the differences between the kind of work you can engage in if your organization is a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(4), including how you can engage with policymakers and political candidates, contact NIRH or visit the Alliance for Justice at [bolderadvocacy.org](http://bolderadvocacy.org).

2 If your city is not included in the Local Index, you can still use this as a tool in meetings. Use the Comprehensive Scorecard as a starting point for policies you want to discuss – both the policies you have in place and want to celebrate, and those that you know are missing – or you can draw upon the Model City as a framework for the conversation. Use cities that are similar to your community, culturally or geographically, as examples. Contact NIRH for further information about the policies your city has adopted, and for support on how you can do your own research to create a local scorecard.



THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (NIRH) builds power at the state and local level to change public policy, galvanize public support, and normalize women's decisions about abortion and contraception. Through our partnership model, we provide state and local advocates with strategic guidance, hands-on support, and funding to create national change from the ground up. We build connections within and across states, arming our partners with the latest knowledge and best tools to advance reproductive freedom for the people in their communities.

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