



## *Campaigning for Reproductive Freedom in your Community*

# A TOOL FOR CANDIDATES

**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 for candidates on how to use the Local Index to incorporate reproductive freedom policies into their platform. It also provides guidance on how to talk about these issues on the campaign trail and how to connect with, and educate, constituents who care about reproductive freedom.

## Address Reproductive Freedom in Your Platform

Your platform or policy agenda should address reproductive health, rights, and justice. As a candidate, you are promising voters that you will address problems and create new opportunities in your community – and the Local Index provides a starting point to understand the many ways that local policy can advance reproductive freedom.

**Review your City Scorecard**, or the Model City if your Scorecard is not included in the Local Index, and use it as a benchmark for how your city currently addresses issues of reproductive health, rights, and justice. Explore the policy ideas listed in the Local Index and identify those that make sense for your community and constituents.

**Meet with local advocates** to talk about the policies you want to focus on in your campaign, get their feedback, and learn about their priorities. Be sure to ask if advocates currently have campaigns underway that you can support. Connect with the reproductive health care providers in your city, including abortion providers, to understand their challenges and concerns.

**Ask voters and advocates** about their experiences with reproductive health, rights, and justice in your city. You may be surprised to learn how much access to reproductive health care affects people's lives, and about how many of these major issues intersect, such as paid sick leave or public transportation.

**Host a listening session**, teach-in, or panel on these issues. Events focused on particular campaign issues are a great way to get diverse folks involved with your campaign and to learn more about voters' interests. Convene stakeholders and local advocates to discuss reproductive freedom issues in your community, and craft a plan for addressing them together, using the Local Index as a source for possible solutions or approaches.

**Understand the landscape** of already-existing abortion restrictions in your state, and pay attention to both state- and federal-level attacks on reproductive freedom – they affect the people in your city. Think about how your city can mitigate the harm of these restrictions and propose initiatives or policies that will make your city a safe haven for reproductive health care.

**Pursue the support of organizations** committed to reproductive health, rights, and justice, including their endorsement if applicable. Develop a relationship with these leaders now, as they can provide you with ongoing advice and support once you are in office.

## Connecting the Dots: Reproductive Justice

*Reproductive justice is defined by SisterSong, a leading reproductive justice organization, as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”*

*The Local Index provides examples of how to integrate access to reproductive health care into your holistic policy agenda. If you are talking about economic justice, make the connection between access to reproductive health care and a fair minimum wage or paid family leave, which ensure that women and families can make decisions about their future with dignity and economic security. If you are concerned with the environment, talk about how clean water is essential for healthy pregnancies and babies.*



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## How to Talk About Reproductive Freedom on the Campaign Trail — and Win!

Reproductive freedom is a winning issue across the country. While research shows that the vast majority of voters support abortion access, disagree with the rollback of our reproductive freedoms, and can be mobilized by strong support for defending and expanding access to reproductive health care, including abortion, policies supporting abortion access may still be seen by some as more controversial than other policies included in the Local Index. For that reason, NIRH has provided the following data and research-based message recommendations that policymakers can use to confidently advocate for these policies.

Important data you should know: <sup>1</sup>

**FACT:** The vast majority of voters steadily continue to support access to legal abortion.

**FACT:** More than 70% of voters think that if a woman has decided to have an abortion, she should have access to safe, respectful, affordable, quality abortion care, without pressure.

**FACT:** More than 60% of voters disagree with and are angry about the trend of recent state laws restricting access to abortion.

**FACT:** When voters hear about these anti-abortion laws, they want to know who is responsible for passing them and how those politicians can be held accountable, and how they can show their support for abortion access.

NIRH has conducted extensive polling and public opinion research on support for policies and positions that advance access to abortion and other reproductive health needs. Contact [localrepro@nirhealth.org](mailto:localrepro@nirhealth.org) for details.

### Message Recommendations

***Be open and specific about your support for reproductive freedom.*** In addition to stating that you are pro-choice, talk about why you believe in reproductive freedom and are proud to support abortion rights, contraceptive access, and/or sexuality education, and discuss what equitable access to health care will mean for the people in your community.

***Educate your constituents about how state and federal policies are harming their communities.*** Provide examples of the impact and intent of these harmful policies, e.g. “*Politicians are trying to shame, pressure, and punish women who have decided to have an abortion.*” Then talk about how your platform will support residents who need access to reproductive health care.

**Use positive messages that emphasize women’s autonomy and the values that underlie reproductive health care, such as control over their own lives and empowerment:**

*“You should control your life at the most basic level: your body, your family, your life’s path – and that includes the right and ability to have an abortion.”*

*“We need to pass laws that respect, support, and empower women. I will ensure that everyone has access to respectful, quality, and affordable reproductive health care, including abortion.”*

**Focus on the woman and what her experience should be like when accessing care:**

*“When a woman has decided to have an abortion, she should be able to get safe, supportive, respectful care in her community, without shame or pressure.”*

## 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.

Instead of ...	Say ...
<i>They, them</i>	<i>We, us</i>
<i>Women, families</i>	<i>A woman, her family</i>
<i>Choice</i>	<i>Personal decisions, important life decisions</i>
<i>Giving details about why a woman is having an abortion</i>	<i>When a woman has decided to have an abortion...</i>
<i>Pro-choice</i>	<i>Supporting abortion rights</i>
<i>Pro-life</i>	<i>Anti-abortion, opponents of abortion access</i>
<i>Demonizing government</i>	<i>Focus on “some policymakers” and anti-abortion leaders</i>
<i>Abortion should be safe, legal, rare</i>	<i>Abortion should be accessible, affordable, and available in a woman’s community, without shame or pressure</i>

<sup>1</sup> Analysis of voters' opinions on abortion restrictions and affirmative policies, NIRH/Perry Udem, 2016



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.