



# Local Democracy Accelerator

Healthy Democracy Project: Standing Up Together for Local  
Democracy

# Our local democracy at a crossroad

## Key Challenges:

- Declining voter turnout (43.12% in 2010 to 36.6% in 2022).
- Increasing acclamations (553 positions filled without contest in 2022).
- Rising political disengagement and incivility in public discourse.
- Economic pressures, misinformation, and disappearing local media.

Trust in local democratic systems continues to erode, weakening civic engagement.

# A Way Forward: Local Democracy Accelerator

The Local Democracy Accelerator, part of AMO's Healthy Democracy Project, aims to revitalize hope and trust in local democracy through coordinated adaptation and testing of practical solutions that can improve democratic engagement.

AMO will help convene community partners in four municipalities, and support them to identify challenges, adapt and test solutions, and share learnings to strengthen democratic engagement across Ontario.

## **Core Goals:**

- More local democratic and political engagement
- Better appreciation for municipal government
- Improved political civility and tone
- Expand and diversify candidate pool
- Increase voter turnout and voter diversity

# Improving democratic engagement through community-led innovation

The Local Democracy Accelerator helps communities test new approaches to solve democratic challenges.

## Process Overview:

- **Phase 1: Convene** – Municipalities and communities come together to identify local challenges and align on priorities (2-3 months).
- **Phase 2: Prototype** – Adapt or develop, test, and refine innovative solutions based on local needs (10 months).
- **Phase 3: Mobilize** – Scale successful solutions, mobilize community involvement, and share best practices across municipalities.

By focusing on local innovation, each community tailors its approach to engage citizens, diversify participation, and rebuild trust in local governance. This iterative process allows for real-time learning, ensuring solutions are responsive, scalable, and impactful.

# Collaboration, inclusion and evidence drive success

- The Local Democracy Accelerator thrives on collaboration between municipalities, civic organizations, educational institutions, and community groups.
- **Collaboration:** Communities work together, sharing knowledge and resources, to address shared democratic challenges. By uniting local stakeholders, the Accelerator creates a collective impact far beyond what individual efforts can achieve.
- **Inclusion:** The initiative is designed to ensure that underrepresented and marginalized communities are heard, included, and empowered in decision-making processes. Solutions are tailored to address the unique needs of each community, fostering equity in civic participation.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** Every solution tested within the Accelerator is grounded in data and research, ensuring that strategies are backed by proven methodologies. Continuous data collection and analysis help refine and adapt solutions to maximize their impact.
- By focusing on collaboration, inclusion, and evidence, the Accelerator ensures that each municipality's democratic engagement efforts are effective, sustainable, and scalable.

# An Approach for Everyone

The Local Democracy Accelerator is designed to be open and accessible for all. We will be working with four Accelerator Communities in Ontario. But any municipality or community group can adopt this approach, use the tools, and share their learnings to help strengthen local democracy across Ontario.

- **Open Access Guide:** A comprehensive guidebook will be created and made publicly available. This will provide step-by-step instructions on how to implement the Local Democracy Accelerator approach in any community.
- **Community of Practice:** We will host regular online meetings with the four Accelerator Communities. This will allow participants to share their progress, challenges, and ideas for improving local democracy.

# Our approach is guided by equity, inclusion, and impact

The Local Democracy Accelerator is built on principles that ensure long-term, meaningful change in local democracies.

**Equity:** At the heart of the initiative is a commitment to making local democracy more inclusive. The Accelerator ensures that diverse voices are not only heard but actively shape the solutions. Equity informs every decision, from leadership roles to community engagement strategies.

**Impact:** The Accelerator prioritizes solutions that create real, measurable change. By focusing on increasing voter turnout, diversifying candidate pools, and fostering respectful political discourse, the initiative drives tangible improvements in the health of local democracy.

**Sustainability:** The solutions developed through the Accelerator are designed to be scalable and adaptable, allowing municipalities across Ontario to continue benefiting from these innovations in the long term. Through ongoing support and shared learning, communities can sustain and grow their democratic engagement efforts.

This approach ensures that the Accelerator's work will leave a lasting legacy of stronger, more inclusive local democracies.

# Phase 1: Convene (A Taste Today)

This first phase is about bringing municipalities and community partners together to identify the most important local democracy issues and plan for solutions (2-3 months.)

## Key Activities:

**Bring People Together:** Municipalities will connect with local organizations, community leaders, and experts to make sure a wide range of voices are heard.

**Visioning:** Communities will explore the opportunities and barriers to strengthening local democracy, focusing on creating actionable, locally relevant prototypes to be tested in later phases.

**Agree on Priorities:** Through meetings and discussions, everyone will agree on the biggest challenges facing local democracy, such as low voter turnout or the lack of diversity among candidates.

**Set Goals and Roles:** The group will create agreements outlining what each person or organization will do, and what the shared goals are for improving local democracy.

**Explore Solutions:** Communities will look at both the opportunities and challenges they face, and start coming up with ideas for solutions to test later.

## Outcomes:

**Clear View of Challenges:** A shared understanding of how local democracy issues are connected and where to focus our efforts.

**Early Solution Ideas (Concept Prototypes):** Early ideas on potential solutions, that can be tested and refined in the next phase, based on conditions specific to each community.

This phase emphasizes collaboration and a comprehensive understanding of local democratic health, ensuring that every Accelerator Community is prepared to engage meaningfully in the prototyping process.