



Twelve Reasons a Citizen Cabinet is a Good Idea

Because a Citizen Cabinet will help:

1. Break through gridlock and find common ground. American leaders as well as the public believe that Washington is so stuck in political polarization that the system is essentially broken. Research shows that the people are far less polarized than the government and that the people are more apt to find common ground. The voice of the people can play a mediating role and help unblock the gridlock. As Thomas Jefferson envisioned the American republic, "the ultimate arbiter" should be "the people of the Union."

2. Counter the influence of special interests and serve the common good. Americans believe that the US government has become increasingly dominated by special interests that drown out the voice of the people. The Citizen Cabinet will give the people a greater voice, making government more accountable to the people and ensuring it serves the common good.

3. Tap the common sense of the American people. Americans believe that government increasingly acts in ways that are counterproductive, or even irrational. The Citizen Cabinet will bring to government the common sense of the American people, providing a direction for policy that is both practical and supported by the majority of Americans.

4. Re-anchor democracy in its founding principles. The first three words of the Constitution, "We the People," clarify the Founder's belief that government should be guided by what Alexander Hamilton called, "the sense of the people." However Americans believe that the nation has strayed from this vision. The Citizen Cabinet is a means to help restore the role of "We the people" in American government.

5. Raise the quality of public discourse. By endorsing the people as the source of authority, the Founders did not mean that government should be guided by opinions based on ill-considered, off-the-cuff responses or misinformation. As Alexander Hamilton said, it is "the deliberate sense of the community" that "should govern." The Citizen Cabinet will create a context for Americans to receive accurate and balanced information, and to have the chance to evaluate multiple perspectives on an issue and actually deliberate, before coming to their conclusions. The process, as well as the outcome, of the Citizen Cabinet will be widely reported, creating a model for higher quality public discourse as well as providing the considered conclusions of the people.

6. Upgrade democracy by applying 21st Century tools to modernize how government hears from the people. The Citizen Cabinet applies new tools for listening to the people that were not available to the Founders. These include: the scientific methods used in survey research, by which a representative sample is carefully selected to be a microcosm that reliably reflects the views of the whole population; the internet, which provides the ability for large numbers of citizens to efficiently *receive* information and to respond; and advanced survey methods that give respondents the opportunity to deliberate on issues before coming to their conclusions.

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7. Give Members of Congress a truly accurate understanding of their constituents' views.

Research shows that many members of Congress and their staffers have limited understanding of their constituents' views on many issues. The views of people who write letters, make donations, or attend town hall meetings are often not representative and most members of Congress do not have the means to do ongoing scientific surveys of their constituents. The Citizen Cabinet will provide Congressional offices scientifically based information about the views of a truly representative sample of their constituents on a wide range of issues.

8. Restore confidence in government. Americans say that the main reason they have lost confidence in government is that they believe that government is not listening or responding to the views and concerns of the people. The Citizen Cabinet will create a highly visible forum in which the government is effectively listening to the people, setting a new model and tone for the relationship between the people and the government.

9. Reengage Americans in civic life. Americans have become increasingly alienated from the public sphere and to the extent they are engaged it is increasingly in limited silos where they only hear the views of like-minded people. The Citizen Cabinet will involve over 100,000 Americans at a time, with a constant turn-over, directly engaging collective issues in a context where they hear diverse points of view and formulate their own. The image of Americans participating in this way will be widely disseminated and create a new iconic image of citizen participation that is likely to have positive spillovers. Furthermore, the processes that the Citizen Cabinet will go through will be made available online, so that any individual will be able to go through the process as well. This will provide an effective educational tool for schools and universities, ad hoc study groups and online chat groups, and create the opportunity for people to participate in an inclusive national discourse.

10. Counter public misinformation. Research has shown that the American public has a number of major misperceptions that strongly influence their public policy attitudes, such as the belief that foreign aid is a large portion of the federal budget. Obviously Congress should not be influenced by public attitudes based on such misinformation. As part of the Citizen Cabinet process, there will be preliminary research to determine if such misinformation is a factor and to the extent that it is, Cabinet members will receive correct information before coming to their conclusions. In the course of reporting on the findings of the consultation, this misinformation will be highlighted. This will help counter misinformation and raise the quality of the broader public discourse.

11. Bring collective intelligence to bear. New research reveals that when it comes to solving problems, while the average person is no better than average, the public as a whole can be surprisingly smart. Methods for tapping into this collective intelligence, sometimes call 'crowd sourcing' have been applied in the fields of business, various forms of analysis, and intelligence gathering. The Citizen Cabinet will be a means of tapping into collective intelligence in the field of public policy.

12. Give voice to minority as well as majority viewpoints. The Citizen Cabinet will not only give voice to the majority of the people, it will also give voice to minority subgroups including racial and ethnic minorities. The aim of the Citizen Cabinet is to find the common ground of the people. This is not just what the 51 percent favor; it is finding policies that address the needs of subgroups that are directly affected by policies as well as the values of the people as a whole. Most standard polls do not have a large enough sample to give such groups a real voice, but with the large size of the Citizen Cabinet it will be possible to have a large enough sample of even small minorities and thus give them a voice.