So the first things, we do have a couple of rules we want to make sure this conversation is moving along.

So the first thing is respect, you guys know what that is I don't have to explain that to you.

So the no identifiers is just keep it to I-statements.

So like don't name people like Mr. So-and-So and "this person with this shirt."

Just try to keep it to I-statements when you're sharing stories about other people.

And then Vegas Rule is what happens here, stays here.

So if anyone's sharing anything vulnerable, don't take it out and tell everyone about it.

And then one mic is one person speaks at a time and then be mindful of other people's times.

Be present, be here.

And then step up/step down is if you notice yourself participating a little too much, give some other people a chance, and then if you're not participating, step up and join in on the conversation.

And then lastly have fun.

We're so excited to have you here and I'm going to pass it to Elizabeth.

Yeah.

So as I mentioned before, this is part of a whole series where we really hope that students can walk away with tools and tips and hear from speakers who have experienced all about what it means to be an organizer and how you can become one.

So today we're hoping to help everyone understand why organizing is an effective method of accomplishing any social change or just social justice or political goals they might have.
So what is organizing?

I know it's a broad term, but there's an umbrella underneath it of what it can mean. And organizing can be political organizing.

It can be at the national level, like a presidential campaign.

It can be at the state level, the local level, the town level.

It can be social justice organizing.

It can be for policy issues, housing.

It can be for labor issues, community issues, as basic as organizing to put a stop sign on your street.

So there's a kind of a complex definition of what organizing can be, but to break it down, it really is just to achieve long-term change through building powerful and public relationships.

It's about influencing and negotiating with government, institutions, corporations, community stakeholders, and really the goal is just to achieve direct representation and holding decision-makers accountable to the people through public action.

So really social movements don't just happen.

They need to be organized, people need to come together.

And it's simply just turning shared ideas, values into action.

Identifying community problems and coming up with those solutions and then engaging existing power structures.

Those people in charge, government, community leaders to make those solutions a reality.

And at the end of the day, it really is just all about identifying, and recruiting, and developing relationships that turn into leadership.
But I will let our speakers get more into what it actually means to be an organizer later on.

So what do you think about organizing?

Do you have any experience?

If you do have experience in organizing, if you sort of put a thumbs up on your reaction, that'd be awesome.

Or if you want to share any stories, feel free to raise your hand.

And if you have any questions about organizing and what it is right now, you can also raise your hand and we'll try our best to help you out.

Also throw it in the chat. if you have an experience or if you have a thought as to what it means, go for it.

I'm not seeing any hands right now.

So we're just going to move on to the video.

So this video is just a video on organizing and why it's important and why it's important in activism.

So I'm just going to play it.

And if you have any thoughts, please put them in the chat.

We're always monitoring that.

I'm Dolores Huerta and I am 87 years old, and I have been an activist since I was 25,

that's 62 years, and I'm still going strong.

I do believe that the people that are being affected by the issues are the best ones that can solve them.

We started the National Farm Workers Association of Cesar Chavez, which became the United Farm Workers of America.
04:52 Knowing that ordinary people have the power to come together, to organize and that they can change policies.

05:00 This is what really engaged me and really changed my life.

05:05 And eventually I left being a school teacher to become an organizer.

05:08 The bit of a moment in my life came when I met this great man named Fred Ross, Sr. and

05:14 I went to a meeting where he showed us pictures of people who would organize themselves.

05:20 I registered in to vote, elected the first Latino to Los Angeles City Council.

05:25 The most effective way to make changes is by organizing, especially at the grassroots level.

05:31 I keep going door to door, canvassing, organizing one on one, because this is where you can

05:34 really engage with a voter and explain the issues to them.

05:36 People get confused so they just throw up their hands and they don't vote.

05:40 But we have to say to people, vote for what you're confident in voting, even if you have

05:46 to leave some of the spaces blank.

05:48 The important thing is to get in there and vote.

05:53 We're seeing a new dawn of resistance, a new dawn of women.

06:00 And if we don't act responsibly, if we don't engage, then we have only ourselves to blame.

06:11 [Rahman] Awesome.

06:12 So now we're going to hear from professional organizers, our speakers today.

06:22 So we have Councilwoman Mehreen Butt, and Suffolk alum and organizer, Isaac Boateng.

06:29 First we're going to hear from Councilwoman Mehreen Butt, she's a councilwoman for Wakefield.
06:35 And she's also the policy director for Planned Parenthood in Massachusetts.

06:38 These are some of the questions that she's going to get to, and if you have any questions,

06:44 while these speakers speak, please just drop them in the chat.

06:48 And at the end, we'll also give time for people to ask questions.

06:52 So I'm going to stop sharing so you can see her and have her speak.

07:01 [Councilwoman Mehreen Butt] I will get used to Zoom.

07:03 Hi everyone.

07:05 Thank you for that introduction.

07:07 So my name's Mehreen and I always start by saying, I just want to know if there's any people from Wakefield.

07:15 I know Lizzie's from Wakefield, but anyone else?

07:18 It's always good to know who's in the audience.

07:21 And then I just want to say everything that I say today are my thoughts and my thoughts only.

07:26 I'm not representing anyone but me.

07:27 So you're going to get a full on Mehreen tonight and not anyone else.

07:31 So when Lizzie asked me to speak today, I had to take a moment because I don't consider myself an organizer.

07:37 I went to law school, I'm a lobbyist in the state of Massachusetts.

07:41 I work on policy issues and then I thought about it and I'm like, "But I convince people to do social change."

07:47 And I was like, "Oh, I am an organizer."

07:50 Like that is, I need to add that to my resume.

07:52 So I will add that after this.
As mentioned, my day job is I'm the Associate Director of Government Affairs and Policy at Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts. I've been there for about a year and a half. And before that I worked at health-related organization. So I worked at Rosie's Place, which is the oldest women's shelter in the country. I worked at the Statehouse for the legislature and then I worked on political campaigns. So I was a campaign staffer in 2018 for a statewide campaign. So I got to work on social justice issues, in my professional life I work on healthcare and trans rights and economic justice, antipoverty, abortion access, voting expansion. All of those issues I got to do in my day job. And all those wins that we've had in the state of Massachusetts on healthcare and trans rights and increasing the minimum wage to $15 and making public benefits better. That's all come through organizing. It's people across the state, making phone calls, knocking on doors, sending postcards, talking to their neighbors, calling their elected officials, calling the governor. So if you care, whether you're starting your career or just an 11-year-old. If you care about social justice, economic justice, health justice, then you need to organize. So that's my day job. And I get to do that on my day job. And then at night, my nighttime unpaid volunteer position, as my father likes to remind me, I don't get paid for doing it, is I'm a Wakefield town councilor.
And through that work, I get to work on campaigns for elected throughout the state and we get to organize in my town.

So a few examples, we changed our board name to a gender-neutral name. We used to be a selectman and nobody knew what a selectman was. And so we ran a 17th month campaign because we had to change our town charter, our town constitution called us selectman.

And so it was a 17th month with two town-wide votes and a valid question to change it to the gender-neutral town councilor.

We organized to get a pride flag in the town for the month of June. And then we organized to get funding for renovations of a public safety building or to have our library be open seven days a week.

That's all examples of organizing.

I like to say that I do organizing because my one goal of being an elected and working on these issues is to be that voice for people that don't have a voice.

So I'm really lucky to have a seat at the table, but I just get one vote to accomplish anything.

I need people to help amplify that vote and help amplify that message.

So a little bit, I'm supposed to kind of give advice and I kind of give this all the time, is find causes or candidates that you care about.

So climate change, reproductive health, ranked-choice voting, Medicare for all.

There's a new campaign to name a new Massachusetts State dinosaur, if you really care about dinosaurs.

Find a cause that you care about or find a candidate.
So we just had our national elections, it's great to find a national candidate, but find someone local.

Find a mayor from Framingham who's the first woman mayor in Framingham.

Support a local person in Wakefield.

Just find someone who inspires you, who thinks like you and volunteer for that campaign.

And sometimes when you volunteer, they turn into full-time positions, the full-time jobs, which is great.

But the best thing about organizing and I say this all the time, and I'm saying it as I look to all of you on the Zoom screen.

There's not a lot of us that spend our Thursday nights having these conversations.

This is not everyone's idea of fun, but this is our idea of fun to talk about organizing and social causes and how we are going to make the world better.

And so what I've loved about organizing and doing this work is that I found other people who think and act like me.

I have found my best friends.

I have found jobs through this, but I found people.

I found my best friends.

I have found jobs through this.

But I've found people who I want to spend my free time with.

I think that's really the best thing about organizing.

Yes, I've made the world better for a lot of people working on important issues, but I've also found people who I like hanging around with.

Once we're past pandemic, that's kind of the most important thing, I think, is just finding
like-minded people that you want to spend time with.

So that's just a little bit about me and what I work on, and happy to answer any questions.

[Rahman] Please put your questions in the chat.

I'm going to go back to sharing.

We're going to hear from our next speaker, and then we'll do all of the questions.

Thank you so much, Mehreen, for speaking.

So next we have Isaac, who is actually a Suffolk alum.

He graduated in 2017, and he has experience in community organizing.

Also, he's a big advocate for social justice.

So I will let him introduce himself and take it away.

[Isaac Boateng] Thank you, Syeeda.

Good evening, everybody.

My name is Isaac Boateng, born in Ghana, raised in Western Massachusetts.

So any Worcester folks out there, hey.

Parents immigrated to the US from Ghana.

I'm currently living in the DC Metro area, working in DC government as a special assistant

to the director of DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

When I think about organizing and I think about the number of people that show up, I think about what's going on in your community and how effective you can make that happen.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I started my own basketball program in the city of Worcester,

working with all youth from all around the city, engaging them on how to advocate for
themselves, but also how they can morally just step up to ask their elected officials what are they doing to make a difference in their community.

But primarily, I'm a Ghanaian. I'm from Ghana.

In Worcester, there's a large population of Ghanaians in Worcester.

Most of my players that played for me were all from Ghana and Nigeria.

So when I think about organizing, I think about the fact that as an African, what are we doing to engage?

What are we doing to actually speak to our leaders and to bring solutions to them?

So I wanted to get all the African community to be civicly engaged in our system by first,

because for most parents, their kids were placed in ESL classes, despite that Ghanaians Nigerians were colonized by the British.

But they could not get a system, right?

I'm an immigrant. I'm a proud immigrant.

So when I first came here, I did not understand how to navigate a system.

So what I did was I formed the African Council with many leaders from Worcester.

The topic of the conversation was to teach our African community of who the leaders are, right?

Because at some point, right, you have leaders coming in the community, asking questions,

asking for your vote, asking, "Hey, I need your support."

But as Africans, we were like, "Okay, we're going to vote for them. We'll vote. We'll support."

But we have to educate them on why they vote for that person and also ask questions to
15:37 the leaders and also teaching them about their rights, right?

15:42 Because as an immigrant, you get scared.

15:44 You get scared no matter who comes to your door.

15:47 I know definitely of folks who are doing the census and door-knocking during this election.

15:53 Folks were scared.

15:54 So it was governed by the fact that we had to teach them what their rights are.

16:00 But also, I also did a Get Out and Vote for a lot of Africans.

16:06 Because Worcester has so many Ghanaians in Worcester, all our leaders came together.

16:13 It was unified together, where we asked questions.

16:19 I worked on campaigns, right?

16:21 Organizing campaigns, ensuring the fact that not just my folks were heard, but making sure

16:28 that youth, black and brown youth are heard, showing the fact that gathering, just organizing,

16:35 it's not just because you want to strive for something.


16:44 So it was the fact that when I worked on campaigns, I'd say, "Young people, we've got to come together.

16:51 We have to come together, and we have to ensure the fact that whoever we elect, we hold them accountable."

16:56 So when you organize, you have to build on a purpose, a foundation of what you're going for, right?

16:58 So for me, when I organize, I look at the fact of, okay, healthcare is one of my big topics, right?

17:00 Healthcare, immigration, and education, right?
17:01 If we look at these three things, these three topics, all those topics are all seen that
17:02 as black and brown and even immigrants, they're debated.
17:03 So when I think about organizing, how I got involved was I made sure to go and talk to
17:04 my elected officials, because I know for a fact that they came to my community and they came and preached to me.
17:06 So it was the fact that when I worked on campaigns, I'd say, "Young people, we've got to come together.
17:08 We have to come together, and we have to ensure the fact that whoever we elect, we hold them accountable."
17:10 So when you organize, you have to build on a purpose, a foundation of what you're going for, right?
17:12 So for me, when I organize, I look at the fact of, okay, healthcare is one of my big topics, right?
17:14 Healthcare, immigration, and education, right?
17:15 If we look at these three things, these three topics, all those topics are all seen that
17:19 as black and brown and even immigrants, they're debated.
17:23 So when I think about organizing, how I got involved was I made sure to go and talk to
17:29 my elected officials, because I know for a fact that they came to my community and they came and preached to me.
17:34 So I want to hold them accountable and ask them, "Hey, what are you doing about the grocery
17:41 stores that are not in my neighborhood?
17:43 What are you doing about the officer who brutalize this innocent black or brown kid?
17:50 What are you doing for the purpose of education, of getting books, bringing technology, educating
17:58 us about what's going on?"
So when I think about that, I think about me.

I came when I was six years old, and not everybody I know knew exactly how to organize.

I started just as a young kid working on the governor's campaign, Deval Patrick's campaign,

and gathering all the Africans together.

At the end of the day, we had a voice. We had a voice.

The governor, Deval Patrick, made African Day on June 15th, recognized all Africans' diaspora in the state.

That's the power of voice. That's the power of bringing people together.

And so my advice I'll say is that the world is run by those who show up right.

And so I, so me and Mehreen can sit here and preach

but I say to you is that you got to be a go-getter right, because if you preach the- if you preach you got to talk too, right you're got to do the walk too.

So my advice I would say is that the road is run by those who show up, right?

So me and Mehreen can sit here and preach to you and talk to you.

But I say to you is that you've got to be a go-getter, right?

Because if you preach, you've got to do the talk, too, right?

You have to walk, too.

So when I think about organizing, I think about what's passionate about me and also results-driven and holding your elected officials accountable.

Please do not shy away from just because they have a D next to the name or an R next to their name, you've got to just say, "We're going to support them."

Hold them accountable, because you know what?
19:27 At the end of the day, they are the ones who show up to your door and ask for your vote.

19:32 So that's what I'll leave it at.

19:36 [Finn] Thank you for that, and thank you both so much for coming to speak.

19:42 We have some questions, and I'm sure a lot of the audience has questions as well.

19:47 So if you don't feel comfortable just asking it, put it in the chat.

19:53 One question that I have is when you're organizing and you're reaching out to people, whether it's community members or elected officials, there are going to be setbacks.

20:03 People are going to shut doors in your faces.

20:05 They're going to tell you no.

20:07 People won't show up to your events.

20:09 How do you deal with these setbacks, and how do you then after you deal with them, how do you overcome them, and how do you keep on going?

20:18 [Boateng] You want to go, Mehreen?


20:24 It's not easy.

20:25 If this work was easy, we'd like, "Problem solved," and we'd move on to the next thing, right?

20:32 It is a struggle, and the struggle is real.

20:34 I am a big fan of celebrating the moments and thinking about the moments in the movement.

20:41 I'm a big proponent of every step, we have to celebrate.

20:47 You take those hard hits and know that sometimes you don't have victory, and it's a slap the
20:55 face, but you just keep on going.

20:58 I mean, I think also, Isaac kind of talked about this, but it's those one-on-one conversations, right?

21:06 So you have an event.

21:07 You have these one-on-one conversations.

21:09 People are going to show up because they like you.

21:12 I always joke that I know when I meet people and I knock on their doors they do like me, right?

21:18 They might not agree with me politically, but they like me as a person, and I get them on my side.

21:24 Some of my biggest campaign donors have been from people on the other side of the political spectrum, but they know that I want what's good for Wakefield and I'm going to work hard on that.

21:30 They might not agree with me on national issues, and they will tell me that they did not vote for the same people that I voted for, but they know in my town, I want the same thing, right?

21:40 I want us to have healthy lives for our families and our kids.

21:45 I want our lake to be clean.

21:48 I want our library to be open.

21:51 I want our police not to have biases as they're pulling people over.

21:57 They know that we want the same sort of stuff.

22:00 So I think I really focus on celebrating the little victories, and anyone that's worked with me will laugh.

22:07 I'm like, "Look, you got 10 new Facebook followers. Let's celebrate that."

22:12 But I think that's really important, right?
22:14 You've got to celebrate all little victories.

22:17 There's not always a lot of them, and so find those moments.

22:22 You planned an event. That's successful.

22:24 So you didn't pack it. That's fine.

22:26 You had a really good playlist lined up. Celebrate that.

22:32 You take the good and the bad, but I think you always remember that movements take a while.

22:37 I'm going to answer Rose's question, too, because it's a little related about building up the momentum.

22:44 Like I said, I think this work that we're doing is really movement work and is not moment work.

22:52 So you do the little steps.

22:57 So the example of Massachusetts is we increased the minimum wage to $15.

23:02 The Raise Up Coalition that.

23:05 We didn't solve economic injustice, right?

23:09 No. The next session, we came back, and we said, "Hey, now we need paid family leave."

23:15 Now we're fighting for sick leave, emergency sick leave during COVID, right?

23:21 We have other struggles.

23:22 So I think if you believe in the end goal of economic justice, there are steps.

23:29 If you believe in true immigration reform, just because we stop building the wall doesn't mean that we all get to go home and celebrate, right?

23:37 We've got to work on Dreamers, and we've got to work on asylum reform and refugee reform.
23:45 The other side will say that you keep on moving the goalposts, like, "We gave you $15 an hour.

23:52 Go home now."

23:53 I think as organizers, you just have to keep on thinking that to maintain that momentum is think at the-

24:01 You know, to maintain that momentum is think at the long term.

24:04 You know. It is not easy, but there's a goal.

24:07 There's an end goal of justice and equality and equity in sight, and so you just have those little steps to get there.

24:15 And hopefully you've built your coalition, and you get to hang out with friends.

24:18 And so, people want to keep on hanging out with you, and so that's how you also maintain the momentum.

24:24 [Boateng] Elizabeth, can you ask that first question again? Sorry.


24:30 So, when dealing with organizing, obviously you're going to deal with setbacks like people,

24:36 elected officials telling you no, people not coming to your events, not gaining the coalition that you want.

24:44 So how do you deal with setbacks in organizing, and how do you overcome them and keep going?

24:51 [Boateng] You know, when I first started organizing, not every time was I receiving the same number of turnouts.

25:00 I think what really overcame that was showing up to people's community events.

25:08 I think that speaking to the ward chair, the folks who actually run those meetings, and showing up there and bringing a flyer.

25:19 Also, what I would also say overcame that was also the fact that I got the number of the leaders.

25:30 Right? Leaders who ran those meetings.
25:33 And so, I would always text them or call them and say, "I'm going to be at your next meeting,

25:40 and can I get some time to talk to your group?"

25:42 And I think that helped out a lot when I began my basketball team, when I began the African Council.

25:50 It was talking to different communities. Going to churches and talking to pastors.

25:54 You know, going to big parties and advocating for what I believe in.

26:00 And so, that's one thing. That's the one thing.

26:04 When I knew I fell down, I knew that I can also pick myself up again by just going somewhere.

26:09 Being, "Hey, I'm here. I'm the annoying guy here. I need your help."

26:13 You know? And that aspect of that.

26:15 And I know the other, Rose's question was how is the best way to maintain the momentum

26:20 of your organization after you have started.

26:24 Keep it going. Find new things that are happening. Right?

26:32 That you feel that your organization can get involved in.

26:35 Or find things that are not clicking.

26:38 So if you see like a law being passed by your elected official, and they voted for that, 26:46 and you're like, "Oh my gosh.

26:47 No, no, no," you can walk up to their office, or send them a letter, or get your group to

26:51 write them a letter and say, "Hey.

26:53 We asked you to advocate for this bill, but yet you voted for it."

26:57 Keep the momentum going.

26:58 Because at the end of the day, your organization is not going to fall down.
27:03 It will fall down when you lose faith, or fall down if you give up.

27:08 And so, always find different type of things that are happening within your community to

27:14 keep your organization going.

27:19 [Finn] Thank you for that.

27:23 [Boateng] And I think Katherine has a question.

27:26 [Finn] Yes.

27:27 So, Katherine asks in the chat, "How can I get involved if I have no experience with organizing?"

27:32 What should my first steps be?"

27:34 [Councilwoman Butt] Katherine, I'm going to push back on you.

27:40 I can't even see you and I don't know you, but there's no way that you don't have experience with organizing.

27:47 All of us are organizers.

27:48 We have done it somehow.

27:50 And I have this conversation in my town all the time, where I try to get more underrepresented,

27:56 primarily women to serve on our boards.

27:59 Volunteer. They don't have to run, but I want them to serve, because they're primarily older white men.

28:06 And I'll have friends tell me, like, "I'm not qualified to do that."

28:09 My favorite story was that a friend, who she's like, "I'm just not qualified to serve on

28:13 the finance committee," and I was like, "You were a senior VP at a bank.

28:19 You have three graduate degrees. You run your household with your two kids.

28:23 You're paying off your student loans. You have a summer home in the Cape.
28:27 Why do you think you don't understand finances, when that's all that you do?

28:33 Oh, you also manage your daughter's Girl Scout troop and selling cookies, and you manage your son's soccer team."

28:40 All of those are skill sets that go into serving to go into finance, but those are all also organizational skills.

28:48 Right? As Isaac said, he put together a basketball team. That is organizing, right?

28:54 And people who are like, "I love the people of faith. You do so much with your church group."

28:59 And you don't think about that as volunteering, but that's organizing, when you get people together on whatever issue. Right?

29:06 And so, you already have the skill sets.

29:09 You're already doing it.

29:10 You're not doing it maybe in a political government way.

29:13 And that to me is like find the issue that you care about and Google it, and you will find a group.

29:21 And I promise you, most people are really friendly, right?

29:24 So if you really care about climate change, you have the Sunrise Movement, who are organizing all over the place.

29:32 I really have always really cared about voter registration and voter education and voter involvement, and so for 10 years I've gone outside of...

29:43 When we used to meet in public, but you have naturalization ceremonies throughout the state.

29:50 They have them in Faneuil Hall, and I would go outside with Mira, like an immigration advocacy organization, with clipboard and voter registration forms, and as people literally
29:59 came outside of Faneuil Hall with their flag and their pin making them an American citizen,

30:05 I'd register them to vote. You know?

30:08 And that was just through an organization that I really cared about.

30:12 And so, I think find those organizations.

30:14 I think find those issues.

30:18 Again, find a candidate. Call the candidate.

30:22 Call and say, "I want to help you. What can I do?"

30:25 And sometimes you're stuffing envelopes, and sometimes you're making calls, and then when

30:29 they see that you're really qualified, that you have all those skill sets, like maybe

30:32 you become someone's treasurer.

30:35 Because we all need treasurers, and maybe you're really good at doing the books.

30:39 You know? My sister works for a big company.

30:43 She trains people, but she is amazing at making phone calls.

30:47 She will never knock a door for me, but she will write me a check, and she will do my calls like no tomorrow.

30:53 She will convince people to vote for me, and that's her skill set.

30:58 And so, we've all kind of got those organizing skill sets.

31:01 It's just finding the issue that you care about.

31:03 So I'm just pushing back, because I think we all are organizers at heart.

31:09 You know?

31:10 And I think back to when I was in high school and did student government, or I organized field trips.

31:16 I did all of that stuff, but I didn't necessarily consider it organizing.
I think sometimes organizing is a word we've kind of...

You need to kind of be like AOC or Ayanna.

And yes, they are great organizers, but we all have that in us.

So, that's my answer to that question.

I couldn't agree more with the councilwoman.

You know, I think Katherine, to add to what the councilwoman said, is what is your passion? Right?

What is your passion?

What really drives you, that you feel that can bring positive change either in your community or in people's lives?

The first step is this, is looking at what's happening in your backyard.

You know?

And so, me, when I started it was more about the African community.

But also, normally, I'd look at the nation, right?

With BLM, Black Lives Matter. Right?

Got involved in that.

In terms of looking at policies, and what we can do as a community to change it.

And so, you are an organizer.

You just have to push yourself to really embrace and see the passion behind it and go for it.

Awesome. Thank you. Does anyone else have a question?

I know Syeeda, you mentioned you had one.

Oh. There's one in the chat, actually.

Unless ask yours, Syeeda, and then we'll get to this one.
Okay. So, I just think this might be helpful for young people who are POC, women, and from a disenfranchised background.

I love hearing your story, Isaac. I'm also an immigrant.

Yes!

And so, I think what advice do you guys have for people?

I know when I was young, I did have a hard time kind of finding communities that would still allow me in even though I was advocating for my own issues, if that makes sense.

So, if you guys have some advice for people like me.

Councilwoman?

Oh, I was going to go to you first.

I wanted you to go first.

I'm only a kid of immigrants. So, yeah.

I think getting your foot in the door is never easy, right?

And as POC and kind of non-establishment, organizing is to make change, and change is really hard.

That's my biggest lesson that I learned of being a local elected, is people are like, "What's the hardest thing you've dealt with?"

And I can deal with the names being called, and that's part of organizing.

And I think I can deal with getting yelled at.

I can deal with the emails.

But the hardest was realizing that there's such a resistance to change, because you are threatening people of...
34:22 Status quo is just easy.

34:23 It is easy not to change how you're doing, right?

34:25 And if the system works for you, then why do you want to change it?

34:30 And it took me a little bit, and I felt like I did this for a living.

34:36 But to realize that me as a brown Muslim woman, I was going to be a threat to that, and so I was not...

34:42 If you Google selectman, it is not a picture of me.

34:46 It is a picture of three older white guys.

34:48 And so just by who I was, before I even opened my mouth, people would see me and see me as

34:53 a threat, and then they were resistant.

34:57 Like right away, there was a wall of, "You're taking away something from us."

35:01 Right? And there's that meme that always goes around, that it's not a pie.

35:05 Like we have equality and justice for everyone.

35:09 There's not limited, just for certain people.

35:11 So I think we have not solved it, but I do think on some of our intersectional issues,

35:19 we are better about allowing people who are not traditional getting involved.

35:26 And I think we know that it's tougher, but we just have to keep on pushing.

35:30 I think what I say to white people, and people that are kind of from establishment, and you

35:38 have that privilege, and to acknowledge that you have that privilege.

35:42 But also...And Ayanna Pressley says this all the time.

35:45 She started recently saying this, and I love it, is that she's like, "I don't need any

35:50 more allies. I need co-conspirators."

35:53 And that to me is what...
35:55 Being an ally and saying that you support it, like, "Hey, Mehreen, I support you."

36:00 That's great. That's great. Now be a co-conspirator, and write me a check.

36:07 Go call all your friends and take them to the voting place for me, right?

36:11 And same thing with my issues.

36:14 It is fine to be an ally, and I can be an ally in a lot of issues, but what does it mean to be a co-conspirator?

36:20 It means that I'm going to listen to the leaders in movement and support them in what they need, but actually act.

36:29 Not join a book club, not listen to a podcast, but actually have action involved, which is what I think organizing is.

36:44 I share this story often, and I reference it early, but when I decided to run for office,

36:50 I went to tell my parents, and my parents are immigrants from Pakistan.

36:55 My dad's a physician and worked really hard to give their kids the American dream.

37:02 I was like, "Dad, I think I'm going to run for Wakefield selectman," and he was like,

37:06 "So what does it pay?"

37:07 I was like, "It's a volunteer job. It doesn't pay anything."

37:11 And he literally walked away.

37:13 He's like, "I don't know why you keep on doing these things."

37:15 And as he's walking away, I want to be like, "It's because it's the right thing to do and

37:20 I want to save the world.

37:22 I need to be the voice for the people that don't have a voice," but he's walking away.

37:26 And I drive home and I was just really upset because I was going to do this thing and worried

37:31 I didn't have their support.
And the next day, my dad calls me, and he's like, "I looked it up and a lot of elected officials have law degrees."

I was like, "Yeah, they do."

And he's like, "So it's not that weird, what you're doing," and I was like, "No, it's not that weird."

And I joke, my dad put together all my signs, they were my super champions, but as immigrants,

why would you get into politics?

People are mean, people are going to look into everything that you do.

What's the point?

I had to connect the dots for them, just like I had to do to a lot of people of why local government is important and why voting in local elections is important.

I do think we have a different hurdle for non-establishment people, so young voters who don't vote...

Your age group barely gets 10% out to vote, right... to people of color, to immigrant populations.

We don't vote at the numbers, and I think it's because we don't see...

We still have to work on the value add.

Yeah. So I share that story and I feel like one day it'll get back to my dad, and he'll be like, "That's not how I remember it," but it was what happened.

I'm sorry, Syeeda.

Can you repeat your question again, please? I'm so sorry.

It was so beautiful, I just like you know...

It's completely fine.

Yeah, I was just saying for people like me, as an immigrant and someone who is from a
39:10 disenfranchised background, I know it was hard for me to get my foot in the door for
39:14 a lot of different organizing.
39:16 So what advice do you have for people who are struggling right now who are from a
disenfranchised background?
39:22 [Boateng] Don't be scared.
39:24 Don't be scared, because you belong.
39:32 When I first started organizing as an immigrant myself, right, as a young kid, I was
nervous.
39:39 I'm from Ghana. I had an accent.
39:41 I wasn't adapting to the Worcester/Boston, "cah," all that kind of stuff.
39:46 I had an accent. But what really drove me was I thought about my parents.
39:56 I thought about their future.
39:58 I thought about the fact that they worked hard and came to the US, but weren't
thriving.
40:05 So I figured to just go out and just get involved.
40:10 I figured to just look at the man who signs the check, the man who approves the laws
and
40:17 makes laws happen, I figured to go and join the campaigns and step up.
40:23 It wasn't exactly that I think about as an immigrant.
40:28 I didn't think about that, right?
40:33 I was like, "I'm American," but American who's driven to bring change and solution
in my community.
40:39 Uh and so um don't ever think that you don't belong because you do and don't ever
shy away
40:46 because you know ,uh you know, um your- your leaders are not there to- to hear your
voice
40:53 they are um, you know.

40:54 So don't ever think that you don't belong, because you do.

40:57 And don't ever shy away because your leaders are not there to hear your voice.

40:58 They are. Like the councilwoman said, it's about the fact that who brings change.

41:01 I know that sometimes, as immigrants, we get scared.

41:04 We get very scared because we don't know how to speak up.

41:08 Some people will be like, "No, no, no, I don't want to get involved.

41:13 I don't want to get involved. I don't want to get involved."

41:16 I'll give you one example.

41:17 I was working on a campaign in Oklahoma for this Ghanaian guy, Kojo Caesar-Asamo.

41:22 He ran for congressional district of Oklahoma one.

41:28 And I was talking to his team about what we can do to bring change and what we can do to get him elected, and there was one particular person who was backing him up.

41:38 This person was an immigrant, was scared, didn't want to speak up, told them that, "Hey, listen, you don't have to be scared, because if he's elected, you can ask him questions and get him to advocate for your behalf."

41:55 And so my advice would say don't be scared.

41:58 Go for it.

41:59 You belong here.

42:06 [Councilwoman Butt] So Elizabeth has a question about some tips to organize during COVID when you can't use traditional methods.

42:13 And that's a really great question because it's been almost a year in this environment.
I actually think COVID has been really useful for organizing, surprisingly. My election was supposed to be in April, and it got postponed to June, but I did calls to get out the vote and because everyone was... Everyone was home, and that never happens. We were having 60% contact rates calling. And so it was really, we were like, "Let's use this. People are home." So I wasn't knocking on doors, but I was able to use the phone more. And mail, people loved getting mail because they were so bored and wanted human interaction, and were reading our local paper, front to back, so if you put a story in there, I would get calls and be like, "Great article," and I was really deliberate about what we put in the news. So I think traditionally you can't go door to door, but I think we have such great communication tech, Zoom and texting. Those are all what campaigns use. I think we've gotten really good at using videos and conveying stories in different way, which I actually think has let us be more creative about stuff. I worked on the ROE Act through Planned Parenthood, which was to expand abortion access throughout the state of Massachusetts. The whole second year of the campaign was virtual, but we had events with 500 people just like this. But we were able to really organize. And what's great is because everyone's in this world, we got amazing speakers.
44:01 We got Senator Warren and Senator Markey to join us because they're sitting in their living room just like the rest of us.

44:07 So I think it's shifted a little bit and you just have to think about it.

44:16 Campaigns are definitely less expensive right now because you're not paying people to go door to door.

44:24 It's not so safe.

44:25 Some campaigns have started doing that, but I think we've done a good job finding other ways.

44:33 I door-knocked in New Hampshire, and we just let literature at the door and then left.

44:41 You didn't have conversations.

44:42 But it seemed to work the way that I wanted it to work, so let's say...

44:48 But postcards, when you traditionally run campaigns, postcards are the least amount

44:54 of success, but I really think people in Georgia and Pennsylvania enjoyed getting those postcards

45:01 from all of us, right?

45:02 And it reminded them to go out and vote.

45:06 The political analyst in me is like, "Was it really successful, or did it just make

45:13 me feel good to write a hundred postcards and feel like I was doing something to save democracy?"

45:19 But I was like, "But it worked, and so I'm just going to use that as a victory."

45:24 [Boateng] Couldn't agree more, Councilwoman. I couldn't agree more.

45:29 Yeah, postcards, Zoom meetings, doing the whole texting chain is one way to organize,

45:38 so I couldn't agree more.

45:43 [Finn] Awesome. Well, I think that's all we have for questions.

45:49 If you guys have any final thoughts that you'd like to share before, or...
45:54 I just want to say thank you for both of you for coming.

45:57 I know as a young person and you want to make all these changes, you see all this stuff going on and you're like, "Oh, I want to change that. I want to fix this.

46:07 I want to make it better," and you're like, "But everything is so big and seems so complex."

46:12 So hearing from people who have been doing this and have done it, you realize it's just one step at a time.

46:19 It's one phone call. It's one meeting.

46:23 Building that up isn't as scary as it seems.

46:26 So thank you both so much for coming, sharing your stories, and instilling your wisdom.

46:31 Thank you again.


46:35 We're going to just go back and promo our next session.

46:40 But thank you guys so much.

46:41 It was amazing to hear.

46:45 Come back next week for Activating the Actors.

46:47 Elizabeth can give you a little bit of a description on that.

46:50 [Finn] Yeah, so we'll be hearing from a political science professor, and then also a legislative aid as to who are the actors, who are the people that we need to reach out to to contact,

47:03 how to get their attention, what methods work best.

47:06 We will be doing that next Tuesday at seven, so please join.

47:12 It's the second of the eight-part series.
Throughout all of this, we really just hope that, as students, we can walk away more confident,
more skilled on how to get moving and how to get advocating and make some change.
So have a great night, everyone.
Thank you so much for coming.
As always, follow us at @suffolkvotes.
We'll be posting all the events and keeping up with that.
You can find the Zooms there as well.
So, yeah, have a great night.