

My Political Autobiography

a reflective exercise



essential
PARTNERS



Talking politics

Because politics is one way we express our deepest hopes, values, and concerns in our community, talking about politics can understandably feel difficult. This is especially true after such an incredibly contentious, divisive election. Our political beliefs are deeply connected to our upbringings, education, religious commitments, sense of justice, the future of the planet, war and peace, and our personal sense of safety and health. So before we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin to think about what comes after the election, it's important to remind ourselves of who we are when we are our best political selves.

Why this exercise?

This exercise is meant to help you begin to transition out of an election cycle that was fraught, contentious, and stressful. It is designed to ground you in your best political self. Especially in difficult moments, it isn't easy to remember why we care so much—or what we're working towards. What story could you tell to help people understand you and your values? What person or place in your life has made the greatest impact on you? This journal is meant to help you remember those stories and make the connections between where you come from, what matters to you right now, and what you're working to create.

How to use this exercise

This exercise is for you to follow however you would like. You could do it all from start to finish, or you could find the parts that are most interesting for you to think about. Write directly on these pages or in a journal that you already use. The point is to spend some time thinking about where your beliefs come from, why things matter to you, and what would happen next if things were entirely up to you.

About Essential Partners

Founded in 1989, Essential Partners is a nonprofit that equips people to live and work better together by building trust and understanding across differences. We envision a world of thriving communities strengthened by difference, connected by trust.



About you: a political history

- ❑ Where are the places you have lived in your life? Why did you move from one place to the next? What changes did you notice as you moved (in yourself and each place)? Finally, how have these places impacted who you are or the issues you care about?

- ❑ List three people from your own life who have influenced your political values. What did each of them teach you?

- ❑ Who is the first person you remember voting for? What about this person and that election makes them so clear in your memory?

- ❑ What is the first political cause you remember caring about? What drew you to care about that issue? Can you remember a story from your past that you think of as one of the first moments you cared about an issue or political idea?

- ❑ What is your first memory of disagreeing with the political opinions of a close family member, guardian, or mentor? How did that disagreement shape your political values moving forward? How did the disagreement impact your relationship?

- ❑ What is one belief you remember holding at some point in your life that has now shifted or changed over time? What happened in your life that led to the shift?

- ❑ What is an important relationship you have had with someone who is very different from you in some way? Why was it valuable to you? What did you learn from them or about yourself as a result of your relationship with them?



Mapping your political life

- ❑ First, take a moment to think about the values, morals, ethics and commitments that are most important to you right now. If you have trouble coming up with them, we've listed a few on the next page; circle the ones that are most important to you right now, adding your own if you don't see them listed.

- ❑ Second, draw a circle in the center of a blank page. The circle represents you.

- ❑ In one corner, list a few of the most significant people, books, songs, shows, movies, things, or places that have had the most influence on the values, morals, ethics and commitments you hold today.

- ❑ In another corner, list some of the things—issues, policies, personal risks, relationships, or people—that you feel most worried or anxious about now. This is where you can acknowledge what you feel is at stake in this moment of change. How are these stakes connected to what you value most?

- ❑ In a third corner, write down something that you would do if there were no limits to your time, capacity, or resources. Maybe it's volunteering, running for office, spending time with someone, activism about an issue you care about—or anything else. What does it look like to be your bravest, best, truest political self? What are you holding? Who is around you? How are your values reflected in that image?

- ❑ In the fourth corner, describe the future you're working to create. How does that future advance your values or the commitments you hold in your communities?



Moral, ethical, and religious values

Creativity	Dependability	Courage
Good humor	Reliability	Education
Compassion	Loyalty	Perseverance
Spirit of adventure	Commitment	Patriotism
Motivation	Open-mindedness	Service to others
Positivity	Environmentalism	Consistency
Optimism	Honesty	Courage
Passion	Efficiency	Education
Respect	Innovation	Perseverance
Fitness	Caring	Generosity



Imagining your political future

First, take some time to reflect on who you want to be moving forward

- ❑ How might the people who most influenced you guide you through the challenges of the coming months? What might they recommend you pay attention to? Who might they suggest you learn from or work with? What advice might they give to you?
- ❑ If a friend who knows you well were to describe your best parts—the things that make you the person you are and most want to be—how would they describe you? How do you want to live out those characteristics in the coming weeks and months, especially as you talk to people who are different from you?
- ❑ What parts of yourself and your relationships might you have forgotten about in the last months? What might you want to do to remember those parts and relationships?
- ❑ What feels most at stake for you? What feels vulnerable? How do you want to take care of yourself in the coming months to protect yourself?
 - If you think about those vulnerabilities, what do those feelings tell you about what you most hope for in the world? How do you want to live out those hopes?

Now, think about how your best self might influence what you do next

- ❑ Can you name two or three causes or organizations (or types of organizations) that you find hope in right now? What might you do for those causes or organizations to support or align yourself with their missions? How might you continue to learn from them and build a community around those causes?
- ❑ What three causes or values do you most want to protect, hold close, or advocate for moving forward? How do you want people to see and perceive you—and the values your activities reflect—as you take action on those causes?
- ❑ Who in your communities who might need some help or healing in the coming months? How might you show up for them? What do you need in order to be able to support them?
- ❑ Imagine it's the year 2028. You look back on the time after 2020 and see that everything you worked toward has come to fruition. The world has changed in a way that reflects the values you cherish. What does it look like? How do you know things have changed? What is different? How do people engage in new ways with each other? What have people done to get to this place? How does the 2028 election look different?