



# ENGAGING COMMUNITY VOICE

Learn how to participate in making change  
for yourself, your family and for others in  
your community.

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When you see this symbol, be sure to take time to check in and reflect on the information shared within this toolkit.

This guide was made with you in mind.  
Thank you for exploring new ways to be involved  
in the good work happening here.

As a grassroots representative living in Kent  
County, we recognize that COMMUNITY is at the  
center of everything we are doing.



# An Introduction to Community Engagement:

Finding ways to share the voice of those who are most often impacted by the system but often not involved with influencing the decisions that occur in our community



By speaking up and out about our experiences...

...with people who are passionate to make change...

we can create a roadmap of next steps to improve for the future.



# Community Engagement Word Bank

There are a few key words and phrases that would be helpful to know as you begin to think about your seat at the coalition table.

**Advocacy** - The application or pressure or influence on the people and institutions that have the power to give you what you want.

**Coalition** - A group that works together toward a common goal or change.

**Engagement** - A process of working together (taking action).

**Grassroots**- A way to describe people who are most grounded to an issue, the most rooted to the cause or challenge.

**Representative** - To act or speak on behalf of others.

## SNAPSHOT OF HOME

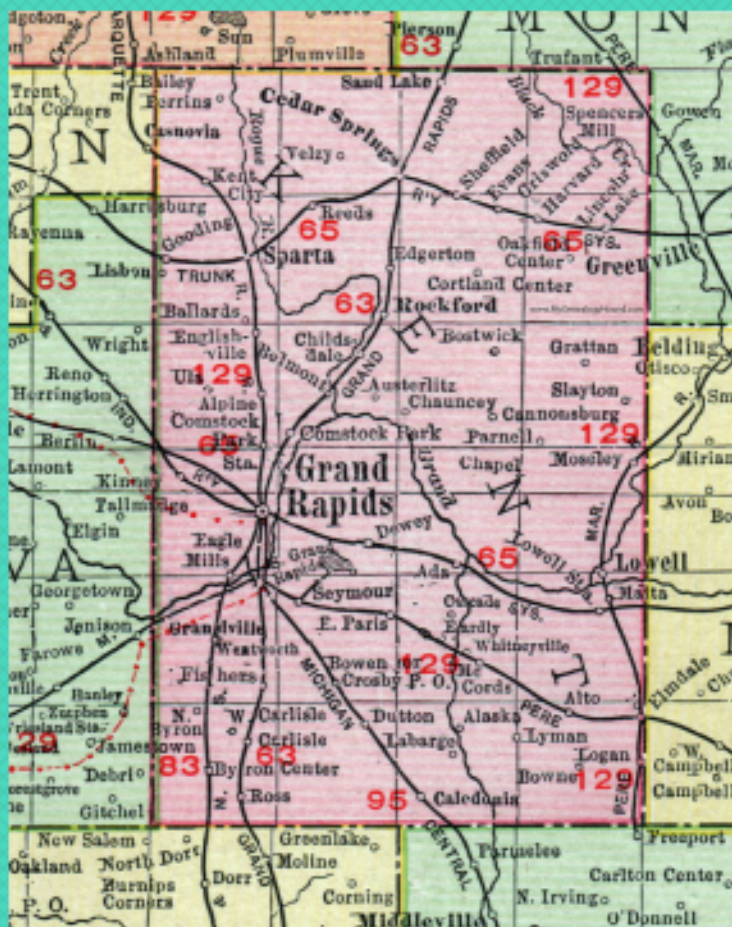
According to the U.S. Census estimates in 2016,  
Kent County is home for around 642,000 people,  
or about 233,000 households.



Kent County is the fourth largest county in the State of Michigan, and growing.

**4**<sup>th</sup> in the state

Many people live out in rural areas as well as inside the city limits.





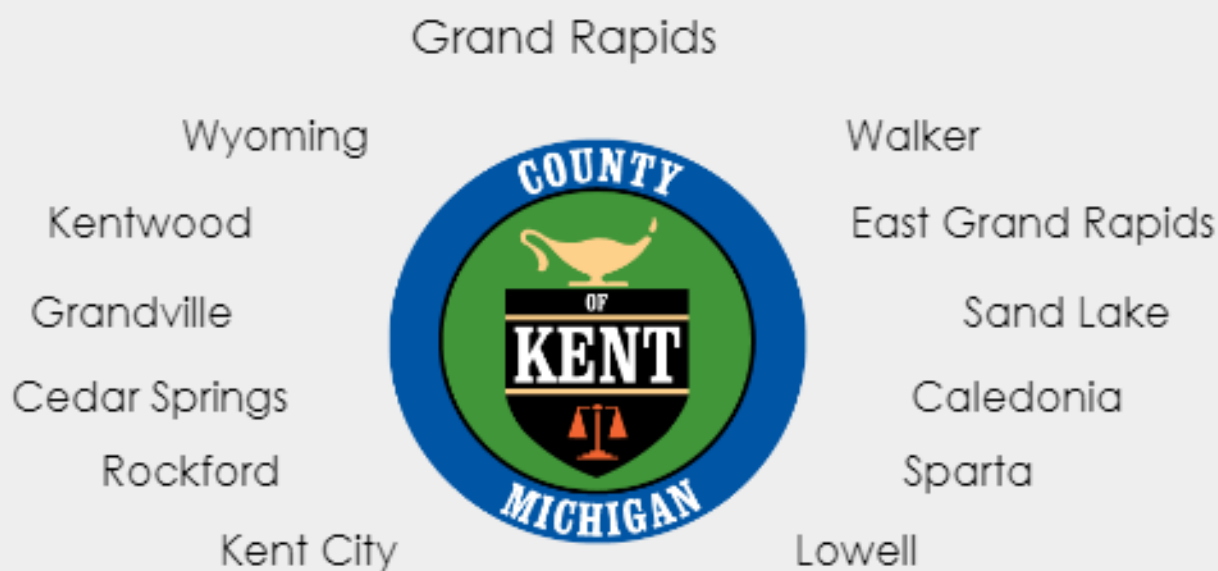
As one person, you have the power and position to make the best decisions for yourself and those around you.

With a group of people committed to the same vision, your power multiplies, and you can begin to make change around you.



It is important to know that we have neighbors, and that we have many cities and towns within Kent County.

Are there areas of the county that you have never seen before?



# Part 1: Community Coalitions

## WHAT IS IT?

A coalition is a diverse group of individuals and organizations who work together to reach a common goal.

## WHY WOULD I JOIN?

Often times grassroots community members join a coalition to represent their unique perspectives on an issue, the needs of those in their neighborhood, and concerns that are not being met by the current system of care.

People with many different jobs and responsibilities are already sitting at the coalition table, and they invite you to join them in making change across the community.

Knowing who we are when we come to the table will help others understand what we can bring to the dialogue.

What perspective can you share that will add to the conversation?



Coalitions form for collective action  
around an important issue or topic like:



School

Childhood



Environment



The work is driven by  
goals or objectives as  
part of the larger  
strategy to help the  
community get from  
HERE to THERE



## The work of community coalitions helps all of us by:



Gaining an understanding of the community



Generating and using power

Political or legislative power (voting and advocacy)

Consumer power (boycott or support local)

Disruptive power (strike or protest)



Articulating issues



Planning purposeful action



Involving other people



Generating and using other resources

**Great examples of coalitions that have strong community relationships include:**

Kent County Prevention Coalition  
Kent County Elder Abuse Coalition  
Healthy Kent Breastfeeding Coalition  
Great Start Parent Coalition

In your community, there are ways to organize around what you care about most. Chances are that others care, too.

Whenever a group comes together around a public concern or issue, we want to hear from grassroots voices, from the ground level.



Think about how adding your voice can help to share a message.

You will be working with a group of people to speak up and make change within the community.

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What issues are you passionate about?

What role or action do you like to do when working in a group?



Take time to think  
about the work that is  
needed most for your  
community.

How can you help bring  
this to the table?

# Part 2: Community Representatives

Starting from where you live and work, what areas of Grand Rapids do you represent?





## WHO ARE YOU?



In order to reach our goals as a community we need to find our voice and share our individual expertise.

As life goes on, we can wear many hats:

- Life Partner/Husband/Wife
- Parent/Grandparent
- Coach/Teacher
- Day Care Provider
- Sunday School Teacher
- Hands on Volunteer
- Knowledge Keeper



Our growing community is made up of many different kinds of people, with a lifetime of experiences.

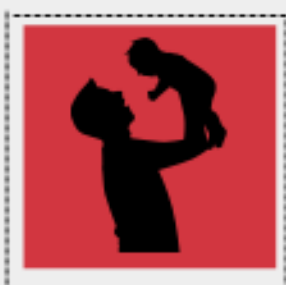
When we come together with one goal in mind a lot of good can happen - we can share helpful feedback from the lessons in our past, give advice to a situation we have been through before, and explore new solutions to problems and challenges.



This means that we need to take a closer look and know who we are to others in our community, our families, and our friends and recognize that our story is worth sharing.



Connector



Parent



Partner



Resource

## REPRESENTING WHAT?

**Rep • Re • Sent**  
/reprə'zent/

be entitled or appointed to act or speak for (someone), especially in an official capacity

## CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

Think about your circles of influence, and what groups or individuals you can name that surround you.

Where do you get your news or information?  
Who gets news or information from you?



You have something special to offer the conversation, that gives the issue a human face. Using your voice and perspective can help to create change.

Stories are great tools to connect us to the lessons learned from the past. Stories can inform us of something new, or help us look at something in a new way.

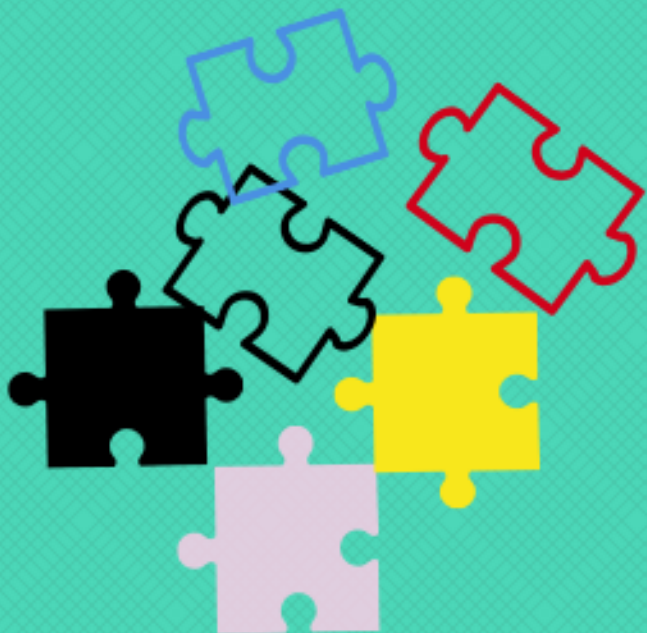




Thinking about who you are and what you bring with you in joining a work group or coalition table...

How many hats do you wear?  
What other roles do you play?

Where do you see your own circles of influence connecting or overlapping?



A large, blank, cream-colored notepad with a perforated top edge and horizontal ruling lines.



**Take time to reflect before  
moving to the next section.**

## **YOUR VOICE MATTERS**

**How does one become an expert at anything?**

**Experience is a good place to start.**



Ask yourself these questions:

Do you take on the role of caring for your family if someone is hurt or sick?

Do you jump into an situation, looking to solve the problem?

Do you often learn something from the experience?

Do you look back on your struggles or lack of knowledge and hope you can help others to avoid them in the future?

Deciding what to share about your experiences, and how to share it takes practice. When we take the time to put ourselves in another person's shoes, we can see where our story might begin to help someone else.



## DIVERSITY OF VOICES

We need a diversity of voices to talk about an issue or topic, so that we can fully explore all possible solutions.

Without your voice involved in the conversation, we are missing key insights from our community.



## SHARING YOUR STORY

### 6

#### Tips for Story Impact

- 1) Make it personal
- 2) Get Emotional
- 3) Use stories and reflection
- 4) Make it visual
- 5) Give a call to action
- 6) Stay Inspired



People will remember the way you make them feel, not just what you say.  
You can help others to personally connect to your story.





Sometimes speaking about something difficult that is close to us can be a challenge. When we talk about it, then others will feel comfortable to talk about it too, and by keeping the conversation open we can "pay it forward" through sharing information for someone else.



Think about what made a difference to you  
when first heard more about the topic.

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Who or what got you 'hooked' on this cause or issue in the  
community?

What do you think others see in you or connect with when it comes  
to your story?



Take time to think  
about why you are  
joining others at the  
table.

What would you like  
people to remember  
from your story?

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

1 Search and seek out people and groups who are involved in topics that interest you.

2 Once you find a local workgroup, taskforce or coalition of interest, practice your introduction - think about your story.

3 Decide where to add your voice in the conversation and how your community will be reflected in the work ahead.



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Speak up and out at meetings you attend, so that others who are not represented at the table in person can be recognized and heard

Add to your knowledge by attending a variety of educational seminars and trainings about issues that matter most to you and your family

Participate in the goal setting and brainstorming sessions for new projects that will impact people at the community level

## Part 3: Next Steps

You've found a work group, task force or coalition in the community to join, and you have taken the first steps to become informed as a grassroots community member.

What's next?



Double check your calendar and schedule the meeting times in advance



Check with the group for official sign in sheets and ask about expectations for your work as a community representative



## ONGOING LEARNING

**In order to be better informed, think about how you might add to your knowledge and understanding by learning more about the topic.**



Search the Community Calendar or check your local library or health department for news about upcoming events.



Look for educational sessions or workshops that are focused on an issue of your interest or that is meant to help a specific population or group of people close to you.



Research important resources that workgroups or coalitions find useful in their work. Seek to understand and ask more questions from the seat you are sitting in today.

There are many ways for you to become involved in our local community. By finding a group you are interested in joining, you will make connections and contribute to the discussion from a different perspective. We need the voice of the community to be present in our workgroups.

For the greater Grand Rapids area, a good place to start is with Access Kent, the official website for social services and the health department, as well as Health Net of West Michigan.



**Health Net**  
OF WEST MICHIGAN

Navigating Care. Connecting Resources.



**accessKENT**  
KENT COUNTY & MICHIGAN

## LAST WORDS



Don't forget to review and sign your agreement forms! As a Grassroots Community Representative, you will play an important part in the work of the coalition. You will learn many new things, as others will be learning from you.

We are excited to build a lasting relationship across the community, and want to say thank you for your interest in this work.

Your gift to us is your time and expertise.

*THANK YOU!!!*

## RESOURCES

US Census Bureau, Quickfacts (2016). available online at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/map/IPE120213/26081/accessible>

AccessKent, available online at [Accesskent.com/about](http://Accesskent.com/about)

Community Tool Box, University of Kansas, (2016).  
available online at <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>

**You will be able to learn more by  
exploring more resources here.**