

## Action Guide

# Moving the Principles of Home Rule for the 21st Century into Action

This new version of the principles and provisions of home rule produced by the National League of Cities (NLC) and the Local Solutions Support Center (LSSC) was not designed to be an academic exercise. It is intended to start a long overdue discussion and spark a chain of action that leads to meaningful reforms to the relationship between states and local governments.

The depth of this structural reform will take time and different forms – resolutions, statutes, ultimately perhaps constitutional amendments. The home rule model created by the American Municipal Association in 1953 triggered a wave of reforms that spooled out over the span of decades.

This action guide will inform the process of building demand for a new, timely, and modern version of home rule that defines what powers local governments need now to protect and promote the health, safety, economic well-being and democratic voice of their residents.

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## Building urgency and capacity to advance home rule

Home rule reform is not a front burner issue – and will not be until a cadre of well-informed elected officials and allies make plain the urgency for reforming the authority of cities and towns to address new and growing problems caused by a changing economy and climate, larger and more diverse urban populations, and new technologies. The increasing erosion of local power and undermining of local decision-making that has resulted from the rise of contemporary state interference also helps make the case for fixing the current imbalance between state and local governments.

Whether you are an elected official, municipal league leader, or non-profit, think of the effort to advance home rule reform as a series of concentric circles that create will and capacity for this work and then expands outward to new and broader audiences.

**Now is the time for a bold, long-term, holistic fix: a new vision of home rule.**

Download here [www.nlc.org/HomeRule2020](http://www.nlc.org/HomeRule2020)

## Start by building the internal will and argument.

**Identify a point person on your staff** who can work with NLC, LSSC, and others to design and implement a plan, spot opportunities, and coordinate resources to move the conversation forward.

### **Document and detail the problem with state interference in your local decision making.**

Aggregate the impact of preemption in your state. List the preemption bills that have been passed in the last decade and make clear what the consequences have been – not for local government, but for your residents. Less control over local zoning (short term rentals, prohibitions on fracking bans). Less local revenue to spend on police, fire, libraries, parks. Less income and fewer benefits on the job (minimum wage, paid sick days). Make the strongest argument for restoring or expanding local power to meet the needs of local people.

**Identify innovations, solutions, policies, or programs** that you would put in place if you had the authority or were not worried about triggering preemption to demonstrate a vision for the future of your local community or communities.

## Define and educate your audiences.

**Determine what allies will help you champion home rule reform.** Local elected officials – in your city and state. State lawmakers who represent localities in the legislature. Alliances of Municipal Attorneys. The Association of Counties. Can the state municipal league help you identify the next concentric circle for outreach and support-building -- community leaders, good government, public health, civil rights groups, and academicians who would support and actively participate in pushing for home rule reform? Provide these allies with tools and opportunities to make the case for home rule reform too.

**Education is key. People cannot be motivated to fix a problem they don't know exists.**

Polling shows that most people are not familiar with home rule or state preemption. But they do understand the consequences for their economic well-being or health and safety when neither the city nor the state is raising the minimum wage or instituting a fracking ban.

This education work is already being done in some states: The Michigan Municipal League has created an online site, SaveMILCity, to educate the press and public about the state's disinvestment in communities, its consequences for local communities, and the need for local fiscal authority. The Florida League of Cities has created a "Local Voices. Local Choices" education campaign to explain and persuade allies to defend home rule.

NLC and LSSC have collaborated on a Municipal Action Guide on preemption and plan to develop fact sheets and other tools to advance the debate over how best to reform home rule.

### **Shape the message for your target audience.**

Talk the talk. Surveys and focus groups conducted for LSSC, the American Heart Association, and state Municipal Leagues have driven the development of messaging that explains home rule and preemption in accessible and values-driven language.

Compelling language helps explain both the need for and value of home rule reform. And making the conversation about the power of people to shape their community, *not* the power of government, helps make it personal and raises the stakes.

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## Put the need for home rule reform in an historical and political context.

The last time the home rule model was updated was 1953. People understand a lot has changed since – including the demands on local governments and need for local action.

The loss of local power caused by state preemption is not unique to your state – it is the result of a push by national groups pushing a pro-industry, anti-regulatory agenda.

## Decide with allies on a course of action and organize to advance it.

### Develop strategies and tools to advance reform.

A resolution from city and town councils and county commissions. Statutes that move the principles or provisions forward. Petitions to engage the community in the debate. A website detailing how state lawmakers voted on state preemption bills.

### Identify the path for moving reform forward and allies you will need to succeed.

- Develop grassroots, communications, and organizing strategies to educate and engage the public.
- Identify and recruit allies to build a cross-issue coalition that is united by the cause of strengthening local democracy.
- Coordinate with (or create) an urban caucus of state lawmakers.

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- Add home rule reform to the agendas of existing meetings of allies.
- Convene meetings of allies.
- Offer webinars and briefings.
- Organize a local power lobby day.
- Reach out to editorial boards, local government reporters. Use the legislative session to raise awareness of preemptive bills, their consequences, and the need a larger structural fix that breaks through the session by session, issue by issue tug of war between state and local governments.
- Engage local champions and your municipal league in earned media efforts to educate the public about the need for home rule reform, the consequences of preemption, and the potential solutions cities would enact if they had authority to address their community's needs.
- Partner with external stakeholders (community organizations, etc.) to author op/eds. Ask them to sign on to a public call for home rule reform.
- Host a home rule rally.

## Resources

Both the NLC and the LSSC have resources to help you design and implement a locally tailored plan to modernize home rule and reform the relations between local and state governments.