

'10 Steps of No Blame Problem Solving' Method: A Case Study of the Veteran Transportation Initiative in Pinellas County¹

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During her Spring 2023 Florida Politics and Government course, [Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan](#) incorporated The [Citizens Campaign](#) "10 Steps of No Blame Problem Solving" method into her course. Students worked together in groups to tackle an issue that they care about while learning more about how local government works. They were to identify a problem, research possible solutions/best practices, develop a policy solution, and then present their solution to the relevant local policy-making body.

This "No Blame Problem Solving" approach is highly customizable to different local contexts and diverse communities, allowing learners to focus on the issues they're passionate about which directly impact their communities. Learners achieve a deeper understanding of local government institutions as they figure out where their solution might be advanced, and they develop a sense of self-efficacy as they learn to find evidence-based solutions for their communities. This is a free curriculum that includes videos and a textbook, and students earn a certificate upon completion of all of the modules and assessments.

In this article, students who organized the Veterans Transportation Initiative present their case study. In March, Dr. McLauchlan attended the [PSTA](#) meeting to observe the group's

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2023 Florida Political Science Association Annual Meeting. Dr. McLauchlan would like to thank the Citizens Campaign (especially David Sherwin and Joanna Kenty) and Dr. Erin Richards of Cascadia College for her workshop at the American Political Science Association in Montreal in 2022.

presentation. Not only was the proposal approved, it was expanded. Dr. McLauchlan had advised the group to start small, with a pilot program, for greater probability of success. But the PSTA approved free bus transportation not only for disabled veterans, but for ALL veterans, in Pinellas County. Steven Brown (a veteran himself) is still working on this class project and wants to take this initiative statewide. (See him discuss the project during an ABC Action News [interview](#) at the PSTA headquarters.)

School Project leads to free bus rides for veterans in Pinellas County



Full Story: <https://wftstv/45wYWtp> "It's kind of an easy ask," said Steven Brown. He had only one question for the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority: can our disabled veterans ride for free? "One of my taglines for the entire project is, it's the least we can do. And I feel like giving back to the veteran community is, like, it should be at the forefront of this country's conversation," he explained.



By: Jada Williams

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<https://www.abcactionnews.com/news/region-pinellas/school-project-leads-to-free-bus-rides-for-veterans-in-pinellas-county>

Case Study: Veterans' Transportation Initiative

Enacting policies and bringing about meaningful change in local communities necessitates careful planning, extensive research, and strategic implementation. The [Citizens Campaign](#) served as an outstanding model, empowering students to actively address and resolve local issues while learning more about their city's government. This article delves into the various stages of the process, from brainstorming and research to proposing solutions and engaging with governing bodies. Students who follow these steps have a much better chance of succeeding in advocating for change. Furthermore, this article focuses on a practical example of Pinellas County implementing a policy change aimed at improving transportation services for veterans. The student group successfully navigated the intricate process and achieved a significant policy victory through dedication, collaboration, and persistence, demonstrating the power of grassroots efforts and community engagement. This example emphasizes the importance of civic participation and inspires others to do the same in their own communities.

Following the 10 Steps of No Blame Problem Solving

The Citizens Campaign served as an excellent blueprint, empowering students to take matters into their own hands and effectively address local issues while gaining a deeper understanding of the city's government. Through a series of “exercises,” the Instructor guided the students through the process from brainstorming to the proposal presentation. The process began with brainstorming sessions, after which students were grouped based on shared interests. From there, they narrowed down various topics until they settled on a single issue. Once the topic was selected, extensive research became crucial. Thorough research strengthened the arguments made during public comment sessions, making it harder to dismiss the proposal. The research process encompassed exploring potential sources related to the issues, proposing solutions, and conducting further research to highlight the issue's widespread impacts on communities.

In order to develop meaningful policy change, it was important to identify the root causes of the issues. By understanding the underlying causes, the proposed approaches became more effective. It also made the proposals more appealing to governing bodies, as they could introduce or reform policies tailored to address the specific issue. It was essential to consider national, state, and local regulations related to the issue. Sometimes, issues were already partially addressed, but it was better to augment existing policies rather than propose duplicate solutions. Furthermore, by examining similar issues in other jurisdictions and identifying “best practices,” students could provide valuable insights into potential solutions.

When crafting a solution, the group had to consider various factors influencing its implementation. Feasibility played a significant role in determining the success of proposed solutions. By basing demands on well-researched evidence, it was more realistic to expect governing bodies to accept and support the solutions, as it reflected positively on both parties and positively impacted lives. After agreeing on a policy approach, student groups needed to strategize how to put their plans into action. This typically involved identifying the appropriate governmental body to propose the solution to and finding out when their meetings were scheduled. It was best for groups to establish contact with the government agency in advance, submitting supplemental materials and building relationships. With this groundwork laid, they could proceed to provide a thorough presentation.

During public comment time during the local government meetings, it was important for groups to sign up in advance for the opportunity to speak. When addressing the representatives, they should adhere to any formalities required. After formalities were concluded, groups should acknowledge the efforts of the representatives already undertaken in relation to the policy issue. A critical aspect of the entire process was to avoid assigning blame to any specific individuals, as

the goal was to promote effective change. By following the aforementioned steps, conducting research, and presenting their findings and solutions comprehensively, groups significantly increased their chances of success.

Implementation: The Veterans' Transit Initiative

The task was simple: find a policy that you want to change, devise a solution, and present it to the appropriate government body. We needed to understand the need before we could even get to that point. In our research to better understand the challenges faced by veterans in Pinellas County, we learned from an interview with Jordan Earl, a social worker in PACT Lake 5 at the Bay Pines VA, that transportation was one of the most pressing issues in providing adequate care to the veterans under the facility's care. So, what can we do to meet this need? Find out who is in charge of public transportation in Pinellas County and who the key players are who govern that body.

Fortunately, during a USF Women's History Month event organized by Dr. McLauchlan, we met County Commissioner Kathleen Peters, who served on the board of the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA). We pitched our idea to her, and she loved it. We needed to do additional research to fine tune our proposal. Our team dug deep into everything from 2020 Census data on veteran populations to disability percentages at scale. We worked for weeks on a poster to present to the PSTA. The big day arrived, and we were both nervous and ready. The presentation to the Board of Directors was not without flaws, but it immediately drew a lot of support. After the initial presentation, we met with several board members, including the CEO. They were eager to collaborate with us and to include us in the process. We scheduled several follow-up meetings to discuss the specifics of what a policy change like this would entail, and we also followed up with

our contact James Phillips, a transit planner and US Army veteran. His efforts and communication were critical in completing this assignment.

Meanwhile, the group presented this research at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg Undergraduate Research Conference and was awarded "Best of" out of 50 posters. This demonstrated that we had community and academic support, so we approached the elected officials with renewed confidence. We contacted every government official in the area, including Governor Ron DeSantis. Florida Representative Lindsay Cross wrote a letter of support to the PSTA board of directors. And Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna is also backing our proposal.

On May 24th, 2023 (after the semester was over), Mr. Brown entered the same room where the group had previously presented, but this time on his own. James Phillips and the CFO presented to the board on what implementation would look like, and the Board voted. Initially, every Board member supported expanding access to only disabled veterans, but thanks to a motion by Commissioner Chris Latvala and a second by Commissioner Kathleen Peters, the vote was extended to all veterans. The vote was 9 to 2 in favor. We were overjoyed.

Since the PSTA Board's decision, Mr. Brown has been meeting with members of the media, veterans service organizations, university officials, and the executive office of the director of the Bay Pines VA facility to spread the word. As of now, the PSTA will introduce the policy on November 10th, 2023, and Mr. Brown will be working with PSTA and the aforementioned veteran-connected organizations to develop a media campaign to spread the word. Mr. Brown is a proud Navy Veteran who is honored to serve his community. For him, this is just the beginning. We implemented a policy that will improve the lives of our community's veterans, thanks to the leadership of Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan, a dedicated team of students, and some hard work.

Conclusion

The process of enacting policies and driving change in local communities necessitates commitment, research, and strategic action. The Citizens Campaign's blueprint empowers students to take matters into their own hands, cultivating a deeper understanding of their city's government while addressing pressing local issues. Individuals and groups can increase their chances of success in advocating for change and having a tangible impact on their communities by following the steps outlined. Pinellas County's implementation of a policy change aimed at improving transportation services for veterans is a powerful example of the effectiveness of these steps. A student group was able to secure support and approval for their proposal through extensive research, collaboration with key stakeholders, and persistence in engaging with governing bodies. This accomplishment highlights the importance of grassroots efforts and community involvement in effecting meaningful change.

This is only the beginning of the journey, as successful policy implementation paves the way for further progress in improving the lives of veterans in the community. The student group hopes to make a lasting impact and ensure the policy's successful implementation by raising awareness, collaborating with various organizations, and engaging with the media. The story of this policy victory demonstrates the importance of civic participation and empowering students to actively address local issues. It serves as an example for others to follow, encouraging individuals and communities to take action, conduct extensive research, and work with their government to effect positive change. Anyone can become a catalyst for progress in their own community and contribute to building a better future for all with determination, collaboration, and hard work.

Links to Articles about the Veterans Transportation Initiative

Fox 13 Tampa Bay: <https://www.fox13news.com/news/sunrunner-hoping-to-add-three-new-buses-as-it-gains-popularity>

ABC Action News 9: <https://www.abcactionnews.com/news/region-pinellas/school-project-leads-to-free-bus-rides-for-veterans-in-pinellas-county>

USF School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies:
<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/departments/school-of-interdisciplinary-global-studies/transportation-for-veterans-in-pinellas-county.aspx>

USF Newsroom: <https://www.stpetersburg.usf.edu/news/2023/how-students-proposal-led-to-free-bus-rides-for-veterans.aspx>

USF Office of Veterans Success
https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ct9UPsmAMSz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFiZA%3D%3D

The Citizen's Campaign
<https://thecitizenscampaign.org/>



Steven Brown is a senior political science major at the University of South Florida (Class of 2024). He is a US Navy veteran and interested in pursuing a career in law specializing in veteran advocacy.



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