

Why I wrote this book?

Dear fellow citizen, I am Maggy MacNikol – a proud 58-year-old lady. Apart from being a multifaceted identity beyond mere titles, I am a dedicated policy advisor and a persistent agent of change. Improving society and relentlessly pursuing the common good have become more than a job – it's my lifetime commitment!

With years of extensive experience, I've worked across diverse platforms, engaging with various stakeholders in government, nonprofits, and the private sector. I am a dedicated individual with a burning passion for improving the quality of life of people and working towards creating a better future for all. This journey has instilled in me a profound understanding of the complexities of societal needs and how they can be addressed.

Through this immersive experience, I have arrived at a firm conviction that genuine, impactful change doesn't come easily or accidentally. It requires meticulous planning, precise targeting, and effective management. It's about creating public services and relevant policies that aren't merely words on paper but tangible pathways to a better life for all.

My work is fuelled by a passion for justice, equality, and human dignity, and it's guided by an unswerving belief in the power of well-crafted policy. I know meaningful progress can only be achieved through collaboration, empathy, and a focus on what truly matters to the people and community. In my view, the pursuit of the common good isn't a vague ideal; it's a concrete goal, reachable through dedication, intelligence, and hard work.

Those of you who have been involved in aspects of transformation – your business, organization, public or private institutions – know the difficulty of crafting a successful solution, particularly those who will serve the public and citizens like you. Public officials and public servants play a vital role in citizens’ daily lives, working diligently behind the scenes to ensure the smooth functioning of society. They create and implement policies that are aimed at promoting the welfare of the community, from maintaining public safety to providing essential services like healthcare and education. By listening to the needs of the people and responding with empathy and efficiency, public servants bridge the gap between government and citizens. Their work, often unnoticed, is fundamental in building trust within a community and making sure that the government’s actions align with the needs and values of the people they serve.

I learned an important life lesson that voting matters and those we select with our vote can make our lives extraordinary or miserable. As such, I deeply value the power of my vote. When it comes time to cast my ballot, I approach the decision with great care and consideration, recognizing the weight of responsibility that comes with exercising my right to vote.

Public officials often make important decisions that have a huge impact on our daily life. Failed decisions by public servants can have far-reaching and often devastating impacts on our lives. Whether due to poor planning, lack of understanding, or misguided intentions, these mistakes can lead to inefficient services, wasted resources, and a loss of trust in institutions. For those who are affected, this may translate into inadequate healthcare, failing education systems, or unsafe living conditions. In the broader community, these failures can erode confidence and foster a sense of disillusionment and cynicism. The effects of these failed decisions underscore the immense responsibility public servants hold and the critical importance of competence, integrity, and accountability in their work.

Despite being elected to serve the public and improve the lives of citizens, some public officials fall short of fulfilling their purpose. While they may make substantial decisions, these actions often do little to create significant positive change for the people who elected them. Instead of improving citizens' lives, these decisions sometimes lead to confusion and emotional stress without truly addressing the underlying issues. This lack of tangible improvement can result in a growing sense of time-waste among voters, who entrust officials with the power to rule and govern. Ultimately, the failure to make real and meaningful progress in the lives of people undermines the very essence of public service, and our trust in institutions and in those who we vote.

What are the “basics” we all, as citizens, need to know before we cast our ballot? How do the elections and our participation or non-participation as voters influence the delivery of public services?

Starting to write this book, I realized that I had embarked on a very challenging journey. First, while I tried to study in depth what books are available to help citizens make informed choices as voters, I must say – it is an empty page. Apart from some elementary text written in some electoral campaign or some administrative to-do list for the voter to register to have an ID presented at the voting station, almost “zero” books are available that will offer some understanding of why voting is important, how to decide which options are suitable and essential for you as citizen and voter, and how it is possible to hold public service and elected officials accountable for promises they make in the electoral campaign.

Second, throughout my career, I realized that public officials face significant challenges serving their terms once elected. What is at their hands is a belief that through the legislative process, they will manage to implement objectives they committed in the electoral campaign. But the reality is that this expectation is too difficult. Throughout my career, I realized that policy leaders almost always

lack a framework, methodology, and toolkit for implementing their ideas. Often even a conceptual understanding of the problems of ordinary people, which are results of public policy solutions taken years ago, is mission impossible, as the public administration in charge lacks tools and approaches to understand the real challenges that citizens have. It is of utmost importance to not forget that there is a constant shift in societies, as if they were living bodies, contributing to many changes. What was relevant years ago, is not relevant anymore, so it's not just about having books to read, but it is also to have something that takes account of all of today's problems.

I found another gap in my project devoted to voters. Most books on the public goods, policies, and how they are implemented have a conceptual rather than an application-oriented focus. They serve the purpose of different academic courses – such as public management, policy analyses, or public governance – in universities to teach theory to students who dream big of embarking on a career in public service. Usually, the authors are academics and experienced practitioners and practical examples are largely missing. No matter how interesting, the information they present is typically communicated through some type of model rather than a detailed methodology and supporting toolkit. In other words, the books available that will teach and help policy leaders, elected officials, and heads of Departments portray policy implementation, let alone provide an inspiration to use in the real-life situations, are very limited.

Overall, in a simple scan of literature accessible to ordinary citizens and voters, gaps on this subject are everywhere. What matters for citizens and voters? What type of transformations in the society citizens and voters are looking for? How to ensure the transformation in practice that matters to people? How to ensure that the transformation is aligned with the promises made by elected officials?

In my 30 years long experience in transformation of the social sector, I have supported departments, agencies, and government bodies in developing strategies and tools tailored to their specific needs while considering the broader policy objectives. And this is also about a deep understanding of the different sectors within the government and how they interact with each other, as well as an ability to identify the key drivers of change in each sector.

I felt my experience has been a real-life laboratory, constantly engaging with high-level government officials and grassroots interactions with ordinary people as users of public services. Learning from the best in governance and public policy can provide valuable insights and knowledge to benefit my future endeavours. Working with Ministers and heads of Departments can be both challenging and rewarding, as it allowed me to contribute to essential decision-making processes. Additionally, discussing directly with citizens how public decisions change their lives for good or bad is a rare and impressive know-how, which is worthwhile to be put on paper.

And this is why I decided to embark on this journey – drafting a book that will help me capture incredible experience from practice in making public decisions possible while working with and for those we vote for. To clarify, dear reader, I do not belong to any political party. Instead, I look at public services from the ordinary people’s perspective and what the judgment is for a good public policy that makes a difference in people’s lives. This is why I find this book writing enriching professional experience, and it has been surprisingly joyful but challenging.

Let us work together to create a brighter future for all, remembering that our votes matter!

The book as a beginner's voters' guide: for citizens, for policymakers, and all that care for our joint future

I invite you to join me in my real-life laboratory that can turn our lives into miracle!

Although it's essential to recognize that your life's direction hinges on your personal talents and dedication, it's clear that many still find it challenging to make significant shifts towards their life goals. Success isn't solely about embracing responsibility and focusing on self-improvement. It also involves a deeper comprehension of the external factors that can support you in achieving your ambitions, as well as the societal changes that benefit us all.

By reflecting on my real-life experiences, let me try to help you to discover one different perspective, which I do believe will help you to generate new strategies for overcoming obstacles, building resilience, and creating a life you love. I learned that this also involves a comprehensive understanding of the key external factors that can either facilitate or hinder your progress in life. These factors may include the social, economic, and cultural environment that surrounds us. Moreover, advocating for positive social change can create a more conducive atmosphere for individual and collective success. In this way, personal development and societal progress are interconnected, each influencing and reinforcing the other. Together, they form a comprehensive approach to success that recognizes both the importance of personal effort and the broader context in which we all live and strive.

The book is a beginner's guide for citizens who want to know more about the power of their vote and how to make better decisions when voting. The book does not cover all issues, but rather, it is a selection of critical issues that, based on my point of view, a citizen needs to be aware of to make an impact with the vote. Please, do not expect a book that will cover everything – from the history of democracy to the current state of politics in the country. On the contrary, the book is a selection of key issues, that based on my real-life experiences will help you to be better oriented in making decisions when voting.

Another important issue to keep in mind – the book does not even deal at all with political parties and analyses of their proposals. Very often, they have been saying too much and doing too little. We need to change that course and make them work for us to ensure their promises are made realities. So this book will provide you as a reader with a set of tools that will strengthen your understanding of being a voter – a citizen with democratic right to decide with your vote.

The book emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and encourages readers to get involved in the political process beyond voting. It provides resources for citizens to contact their elected representatives, join advocacy groups, and become informed on political issues. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for citizens who want to make a difference in their communities and use their votes to shape the future of their local communities, their country, and their nation.

This book is not a receipt for action. But it is a reading for you as a citizen, to become aware of different points of view and what matters in any elections that has a significant impact on your life. If you are a policymaker, then this book will help you to understand better the complex environment of making decisions and how they impact people's lives.

How to make the maximum from reading this book?

The first issue to keep in mind when reading the book is that elections and voting are not just about politicians and government officials; it's about us, the people, and how we fit into the system. We might not all be experts in political science, but we all live under the rules and regulations set by those in authority. In other words, keep in mind that while we as ordinary people are not dealing with politics and policy-making, the politics and policy-making are heavily dealing with our lives! And this is the core of each chapter – but from different dimensions. Whether it's making sure our voices are heard when possible, understanding what our leaders are doing on our behalf, or finding ways to make sense of the complex processes that turn ideas into laws, these issues are your starting point for thinking how to benefit from this book, making you more aware and engaged as a citizen and as a voter.

At the beginning of each chapter, you will find short stories, where the key actors are Fabio, Alice, and Mayor Sabina Bianchi. I initially portrayed Fabio as a character marked by apathy towards the voting process, firmly entrenched in the belief that his individual voice could not influence the broader political landscape. His scepticism serves as a barrier to participation, reflecting a broader sentiment of marginalization among people who feel detached from the society and community. On the other side is Alice defined by her optimism and her ability to inspire change in others, demonstrating a deep understanding of the significance of each vote. Mayor Sabina Bianchi emerges as a transformative figure within the narrative of Greenville's elections for a Mayor, embodying the spirit of innovation and inclusivity. She is characterized by her forward-thinking approach, understanding that genuine engagement goes beyond mere campaigning. Unlike her opponent, Davide Rossi, who

represents a bit of an old-fashioned ruler, Sabina seeks to revolutionize the way politics is conducted and perceived in Greenville. Greenville is a city marked by socio-economic divides and systemic challenges and is a focus of the short stories.

At the end of each section, you will find “LAB Guideline,” associated clearly with the chapter dimension. The objective of the guideline is not only to help you summarise the key issues in the chapter, but also to encourage you to think deeply about each real life dimension and what does it mean for your role as a citizen, how you relate to it, and what you can do to bring brighter joint future. By examining these guidelines, you will get number of ideas and gain insights into your role in the society and how you can actively contribute to a better future. Whether you are directly involved or simply wish to understand how you can contribute, reflecting on these guidelines can direct you towards a more proactive and informed role in shaping the social landscape of your community.

So, take some time to examine these “LAB Guidelines.” You might find that they spark new ideas, raise new questions, or even inspire you to learn more about how you can make a difference in your community. Being an active and informed citizen isn’t limited to one particular system of government; it’s about understanding how things work, asking questions, and finding ways to participate in the decisions that affect our lives. These questions are a way to explore what that means for each of us.

The “Thinking LAB” are questions for reflection that you will find after each “LAB Guideline.” They are vital checkpoints for you in the ongoing journey of understanding the complexity and the net in which we find ourselves as voters. Going deeper into the reflective questions will foster a culture of learning and improvement, which you will experience right from Chapter 1. In this light, reflective thinking becomes not just an intellectual exercise but a practical and essential one in achieving sustained success and growth. These

questions are meant to get you thinking about how you, as an ordinary citizen, interact with and influence the systems such as education, healthcare, and transport in your everyday lives. From understanding what your rights and obligations are, to knowing how decisions are made by those in power, these questions ask you to reflect on your role in the bigger picture of the society.