

What sparked your desire to start Power 2 the Polls?

Kennedy: I think voting is one of the single most important things we as Americans can do. It's how we ensure we have a say in the policies happening around us and to us. It's also how we hold our elected officials accountable. However, so many people do not exercise their right to vote because they don't know how to and no one has cared enough to spend the time to teach them. Even more than that, communities of color have throughout history been blatantly ignored within the political process. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, I was searching for a way to help turn the anger and unrest within the community around me into some sort of change and voting was a way to do that. Thankfully Katherine and Sarah were looking to do the same thing.

Katherine: It would be dishonest to say that Power 2 the Polls was intentional. From the very beginning, I had no intention or idea that we could build such a strong team and create something that provided a real service to our community. Following George Floyd's murder, I was restless and angry, I wanted to do something that made me feel productive and like I was doing even the tiniest bit of good. I have always had a love for civic engagement and racial equity, and when I met two other powerful women who had a similar vision, there really was nothing that could get in our way.

Sarah: Like so many others, the murder of George Floyd was a tipping point for me. Social media activism was never enough. It certainly wasn't enough for this moment—or the over 8 minutes—that police kneeled on Mr. Floyd's neck. Our communities were hurt, frustrated, angry, and scared. I know that I experienced these emotions from a place of privilege as a white woman. The fear is different for so many people in my community. For so many of my neighbors. For so many people I love. The global outpouring of emotion resulting from Mr. Floyd's murder should be used for change. We started Power 2 the Polls to translate that emotional unrest into political power.

Why did you decide to begin a grassroots organization over joining an ongoing effort?

Kennedy: I actually really like both your answers here so I yield my time to you two.

Katherine: When we first started, Sarah, Kennedy, and I had nothing but three borrowed clipboards and the belief that we could make change. We didn't know much, but we recognized a unique opportunity to mobilize our community members as more people were taking to the streets than ever before. There was not an organization we were aware of that was meeting protestors in the streets with registration forms. So that was the gap we filled. Our work has evolved a lot since then, but our goal has remained the same: to help our neighbors bring their power to the polls. One of the best parts of the journey has been meeting other community organizers committed to the work. Power 2 the Polls has received an influx of support from other non-profits and has often been able to fill voter registration gaps for organizations that support the work but haven't prioritized it.

Sarah: We wanted to start something right here, right now. We wanted to be out in our communities. We wanted not only to be witnesses to the protests happening in our neighborhoods, but also to be active participants in them. We also wanted to be able to amplify and support existing efforts in the area.

How has your vision for your work/mission different from the work needing to be done?

(Put differently) How has your organization shifted to meet the needs of voters in Missouri and Illinois?

Kennedy: We have done a lot of learning throughout this whole process, and thankfully we have some really, really awesome team members who have guided that learning. Missouri and Illinois have some different requirements when it comes to voting, and with mail in voting becoming a necessity for a lot of people through Covid-19 we wanted to ensure we were educated on that process. Some of our incredible team members have put together what we call Voter FAQs to answer any questions anyone may have about voting. They can be found on our website at www.power2thepolls.org . If you have any questions please consult them!

Katherine: Voter engagement has always been low, so we knew we were facing an uphill battle from the beginning. Covid-19 only exacerbated the obstacles of the work. Some of the ways we've navigated this for our team has been providing the necessary personal safety equipment for all our team members (masks, gloves, sanitizer), as well as offering remote opportunities to engage. We recently compiled a list of over 100 black-owned businesses in the St. Louis area, and team members have been calling to coordinate partnerships and distribution of voter engagement materials. For the public, we provide updated information regarding absentee and mail-in voting in our FAQs on the website, <https://www.power2thepolls.org/missouri-voting-faqs>, as well as call and mail reminders of upcoming elections.

Sarah: Like everything else, the Coronavirus has affected our efforts to register voters quite a bit. We try to stay on top of any updates on vote-by-mail since that will be such a big issue in this election. Then we work to facilitate solutions to make it easier for anyone and everyone to get their vote in and their voice heard. We sent out vote-by-mail request forms for the Primary Election and will do so again for the General Election in November.

What is the single message you would like people to know about your cause?

Kennedy: VOTE! If you are scared, if you don't know how, if you need a friend or accountability partner to get you there, let us know! We just want to make sure everyone has the right to make their voice heard if they desire to do so. There is so much at stake this election!

Katherine: You matter. It's easy to feel small in this crazy world, but we all have an enormous capacity to make positive change. Voting is one of the most powerful ways to do just that.

Sarah: We all deserve to have our voices heard and votes counted.

What is the biggest misconception/barrier you face in the work?

Kennedy: We have encountered a lot of people who have chosen not to register because they do not think their vote matters. This is just not true. Even if you truly hate our system, the reality of the matter is that voting is the only way our voices are heard by the people in power at a more formal level.

Katherine: A lot of people are frustrated with the system and have consequently chosen not to engage. I can empathize with the frustration; the system is fundamentally flawed. But the fact of the matter is that this is the system we have, and the only way to change it is from the inside. The vote is our most powerful tool to determine who's a part of that internal revolution. I

personally am incredibly frustrated by those apathetic about civic engagement. We all impact the political arena in one way or another, even those who elect not to vote. Someone is always going to win, so Power 2 the Polls encourages everyone to actively support the candidates and ballot initiatives that most align with their civic concerns.

Sarah: People try to run when they think someone wants them to sign a petition. There was some of that. But seriously, I think the biggest barrier we face is finding and seeking out people who have never been called to vote. Beyond finding those people, we need to be having conversations with them to see what barriers they face around voting.

Where are you seeing hope in the democratic process of voting?

Kennedy: I am seeing hope in my generation. We are fed up, angry with, and ready to change what has been happening around us.

Katherine: I yield my time to Sarah and Kennedy

Sarah: I see so much hope in the young people. But I also see so much hope in young adults who have been able to vote for years but never felt motivated enough to register to vote until something shook them into it. Finally, I see hope in voter rights being restored to former felons across the country.

What has surprised you?

Kennedy: What has surprised me is how many people we have been able to register in a short amount of time. Some weekends we have had volunteers at 5 different events over 1 or 2 days. We have registered over 200 people to vote and have helped countless more to go online and research the issues that will be on their ballots this election cycle. It's awesome!

Katherine: Honestly, I've been most surprised by the bandwidth of our leadership team. We founded Power 2 the Polls while we all had full-time jobs, family obligations, and the emotional and mental burden of the tragic events of the summer. Day-in and day-out we each dedicated countless hours, energy, and passion to the work. Power 2 the Polls truly would be nothing without Sarah and Kennedy and I am exorbitantly grateful to call them friends and colleagues.

Sarah: The time, money, and energy it takes to organize an effort of this magnitude.

How is your organization preparing for the November election? Are there any misconceptions related to the pandemic that has made this more challenging?

Kennedy: We are preparing by finding ways to get our resources out to the community, whether that be through social media, our QR codes, or standing at the metro stop down the street asking people to register to vote. We are trying our best to engage with as many voters as possible before October 7th. Then our goal is to educate and inspire people heading into the November 3rd election. There have been some huge misconceptions about mail-in voting--that it's different from absentee, that it is unsafe, insecure, or only certain people can do it. All of that

is just not true so we are working through our educational resources and one-on-one conversations to dispel those misconceptions when we come into contact with them.

Katherine: I'm preparing by having a small panic attack once a week (kidding!...half kidding). The deadline to register to vote in Missouri is Oct. 7 and Illinois is Oct. 18. Through those deadlines our priority is to register as many voters as we possibly can. We've already registered over 200 people and are not slowing down any time soon. Following this deadline, we will be supporting our neighbors in their absentee/mail-in initiatives. Team members are becoming notaries, rides to the polls are being facilitated, and water bottles are being prepared for delivery on election day!

Sarah: As soon as the Missouri registration deadline passes on October 7, 2020, our sole priority will be to educate, engage, and enable Missouri voters to get to the polls on November 3. We will follow the same approach in Illinois in line with their registration guidelines. We have seen some panic in the last few weeks regarding vote-by-mail and the USPS being in the news. I think it is so important that we all encourage one another to make a voting plan early. If you are going to the polls, go as early as you can make it. If you are voting by mail, mail it in as early as you can. Check out your local election board to find out if you can drop off your ballot in person. Planning early will make a huge difference! If you do not find the answers you need, reach out to us at info@power2thepolls.org !

How do you measure success and what successes can you share from recent elections?

Kennedy: We measure success in a couple of ways I think. First off, we keep count of how many people register. However, that isn't always the best way to measure success. Success for us is when we get someone to stop and think, "yeah maybe I will go vote this time" or "hmm maybe I should look up who my representative is and what they stand for". I think our goal is to encourage, empower, and educate potential voters as much as we can.

Katherine: I've always appreciated measurable goals and lofty ambitions, so when we first started we had a mission to register 5,000 voters. Although that was not particularly realistic, it propelled us to go further than we ever would have imagined. In the three months since our inception, we've registered over 200 people to vote. I am immeasurably proud of that feat, but success has never been determined by that. Instead, Power 2 the Polls is successful when we speak to every person attending an event, when we connect with other community leaders to share resources, when we provide information and clarify confusing voter questions. In that way, we have been successful from the very beginning. But above everything else, what is particularly rewarding is registering a first time voter. It feels good to know our team was able to facilitate a community member exercising their right to vote for the very first time.

Sarah: Because we register people to vote in so many ways, total numbers can be difficult to track. I measure our success by the number of people our group interacts with. As many people as we have registered to vote, we have had so many more conversations. Even long-time registered voters sometimes need a reminder to change their address. Some people do not realize they are eligible to vote because of past legal issues. Some people want to register as election judges. And some people just need to run into someone out on the street, reminding them to get their voting affairs in order. Voting excitement is contagious and we need to spread it!

What are you looking forward to?

Kennedy: November 3rd and voting, as well as helping others to do the same!

Katherine: Wine night with the team November 4th!

Sarah: I am looking forward to the urgency of the last two months before the election. We are getting creative and thinking outside the box for ways to reach as many people as we can from as many different backgrounds as we can. Power 2 the Polls has been a great way to get involved with my community, and I look forward to doing more of that.

Where and how can people get involved with Power 2 the Polls?

Kennedy: I like Sarah's answer here.

Katherine: I yield my time to Sarah.

Sarah: We would love to have passionate volunteers join us! Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and check out our website at www.power2thepolls.org . From there, you can register to vote, join our team, find our voting FAQs, and more. There are a variety of ways to get involved and I am sure we can find something that would work for you. For more information about what our team is doing and how to get involved, email us at info@power2thepolls.org !