

Prompts for Writing About Systemic Change

Identifying the System

- What system, institution, or policy created this problem?
- Who benefits from the current system?
- Who is consistently harmed or excluded?
- What patterns keep repeating across different people or communities?
- What problem is treated as “individual failure” but is actually systemic?

Revealing Root Causes

- What conditions allowed this issue to continue for so long?
- What incentives maintain the status quo?
- What assumptions or beliefs are embedded in the system?
- Where does accountability break down?
- What historical decisions contributed to the current situation?

Human Impact

- How does this system affect daily life in visible and invisible ways?
- What emotional toll does this create over time?
- What opportunities are lost because of the system?
- How do people adapt or survive within the system?
- What stories are ignored because they challenge the dominant narrative?

Power and Decision-Making

- Who has the power to create change?
- Who is missing from decision-making conversations?
- What voices are routinely dismissed or minimized?
- What would shared power look like?
- How does bureaucracy, funding, or leadership reinforce the issue?

Imagining Better Systems

- What would prevention look like instead of reaction?
- What would equity look like in practice?
- If this system were designed around dignity, what would change?
- What policies or structural supports could address root causes?
- What examples already exist that show another way is possible?

Inspiring Collective Action

- What responsibility do communities, leaders, and institutions share?
- What change requires collective—not individual—action?
- What alliances or coalitions are needed?
- What makes people resistant to systemic change?
- What would happen if nothing changes in the next 5–10 years?

Strong Framing Questions

- “Why are we asking people to overcome barriers we continue to build?”
- “What are we normalizing that should be unacceptable?”
- “Who pays the price for institutional inaction?”
- “What would it mean to redesign this system from the ground up?”
- “What becomes possible when we treat this as a structural issue instead of a personal one?”

Closing Prompts for Calls to Action

- What is the first structural change that must happen now?
- What accountability should look different moving forward?
- What does long-term change require beyond awareness?
- What can institutions stop doing immediately?
- What future becomes possible if systemic change succeeds?

Key Features of Maine's Citizen-Run Government

Part-Time Legislature

The Maine Legislature is primarily part-time.

- Legislators are paid relatively modest salaries.
- Most representatives and senators work other jobs:
 - teachers
 - fishermen
 - healthcare workers
 - small business owners
 - tradespeople
- Sessions are limited:
 - Long session in odd-numbered years
 - Short session in even-numbered years

This structure is intended to keep lawmakers connected to everyday life and local concerns.

Strong Local Government Tradition

Many decisions in Maine happen at the:

- town level
- city councils
- select boards
- school boards
- county commissions

Especially in rural communities, citizens often participate directly through:

- town meetings
- public hearings
- local committees

This creates a culture where residents expect access to decision-makers.

Town Meeting Democracy

A hallmark of Maine governance is the New England-style town meeting.

In many smaller towns:

- residents gather in person
- debate budgets and policies
- vote directly on local issues

This is one of the oldest forms of direct democratic participation in the United States.

Citizen Legislature Philosophy

The idea behind a citizen legislature is:

- government should be temporary public service
- elected officials should remain rooted in their communities
- policymaking should reflect practical local experience

Supporters argue this:

- reduces political elitism
- increases accessibility
- encourages pragmatic problem-solving

Critics argue it can:

- limit policy expertise
 - favor people who can afford lower pay
 - increase dependence on lobbyists or staff expertise
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Independent Political Culture

Maine is known for:

- high voter engagement
- independent-minded voters
- split-ticket voting
- strong local identity

The state has a long tradition of electing:

- independents
- moderates

- community-focused leaders

Examples include figures like Margaret Chase Smith and Angus King.

Citizen Initiatives and Referendums

Maine voters can directly shape policy through:

- ballot initiatives
- referendums
- people's vetoes

Citizens can gather signatures to:

- propose laws
- repeal laws passed by the legislature

This gives residents unusually direct influence over state policy.

Why People Call It “Citizen-Run”

The phrase reflects the idea that:

- ordinary residents remain deeply involved in governing
- political power is relatively decentralized
- elected officials are accessible and community-based
- civic participation is culturally expected

It's less about government being literally run by random citizens and more about maintaining strong public participation and nonprofessional political leadership.