

# ENGAGING GENERATION Z

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL CIVICS AND POLICY

Teenagers and young adults are experiencing unprecedented increases in access to information, global consciousness, organizing tools, and advocacy resources than prior generations. Local government leaders have tremendous opportunities to promote youth civic participation, leadership skill development and engagement in governance. Through this panel, discussion will focus on local innovations and mayoral leadership that support youth empowerment and engagement. Topics will include issue-specific projects to address climate change and gun control, as well as strategies for creating equitable, sustained opportunities for youth involvement in governance and policy.

## RESOURCES

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Pages excerpted from: “Authentic Youth Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders,” Institute for Youth, Education & Families, National League of Cities, 2010.

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“Top Ten Reasons to Lower the Voting Age,” National Youth Rights Association, [www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/top-ten-reasons-to-lower-the-voting-age/](http://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/top-ten-reasons-to-lower-the-voting-age/), accessed July 11, 2019.

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## SPEAKERS

### IVANNA FREGOSO, CITY OF MIRAMAR, FL

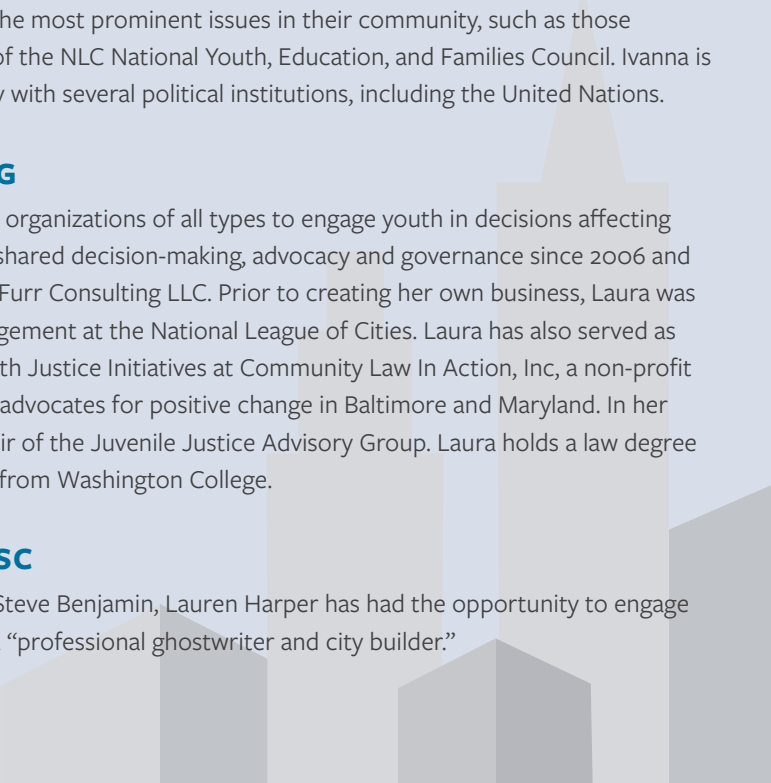
Ivanna Fregoso Frias is a senior in high school in Miramar, FL. She is also the president of the Miramar Youth Advisory Council, where she works with the city board to address some of the most prominent issues in their community, such as those concerning gun control and education. She is also a part of the NLC National Youth, Education, and Families Council. Ivanna is the captain of her debate team and has worked vigorously with several political institutions, including the United Nations.

### LAURA FURR, LAURA FURR CONSULTING

Laura Furr supports local governments and youth-serving organizations of all types to engage youth in decisions affecting them. She has supported adults and youth as partners in shared decision-making, advocacy and governance since 2006 and now dedicates her work exclusively to this through Laura Furr Consulting LLC. Prior to creating her own business, Laura was the Program Manager for Justice Reform and Youth Engagement at the National League of Cities. Laura has also served as the Interim Executive Director and Senior Director of Youth Justice Initiatives at Community Law In Action, Inc, a non-profit that engages youth as active citizens, critical thinkers and advocates for positive change in Baltimore and Maryland. In her home city of Washington DC, Laura volunteers as the Chair of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. Laura holds a law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law and a B.A. from Washington College.

### LAUREN HARPER, CITY OF COLUMBIA, SC

As former communications and policy advisor for Mayor Steve Benjamin, Lauren Harper has had the opportunity to engage with and influence the lives of Columbia, SC residents as a “professional ghostwriter and city builder.”



Lauren graduated from the University of South Carolina with Leadership Distinction (GLD) with a degree in public relations. Her current role is South Carolina State Director for former Congressman Beto O'Rourke. She is also CEO of CityBright, LLC., a public affairs firm.

### **MAYOR JAKE SPANO, CITY OF ST. LOUIS PARK, MN**

Jake Spano was elected as mayor of St. Louis Park, MN in 2016 after a four-year term as council member at large B (2012-2016). His day job is as deputy secretary of State to Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon. Prior to that, he was the marketing director for the City of St. Paul in Mayor Coleman's administration and before that he served with U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar overseeing statewide policy and leading her four state offices and staff.

Mayor Spano serves on the Southwest Light Rail Transit Corridor Management Committee and the Executive Committee for the Regional Council of Mayors, and is a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. He is a member of the Transportation Committee for the National League of Cities (NLC) Federal Advocacy Board, chair of the NLC Transit Subcommittee and co-vice chair of the NLC 2019 Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) Council.

Prior to his public service, Mayor Spano worked as a project manager and account executive in the architecture, design and construction industry. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Hamline University and his master's degree from the University of Minnesota-Duluth.







# All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement

The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge

2013



Jonathan M. Tisch  
College of Citizenship  
and Public Service



# A Call to Action

Each new generation must become active, informed, responsible, and effective citizens. As a teacher we surveyed for this report said, civic education “is essential if we are to continue as a free democratic society. Not to educate the next generation will ensure the destruction of our American way of life as we know it.”

Data show that many young Americans are reasonably well informed and active. For instance, 45% of citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in the 2012 election. In a national survey conducted for this Commission, 76% of people under the age of 25 who voted could correctly answer at least one (out of two) factual questions about where the presidential candidates stood on a campaign issue and state their own opinion on that issue.

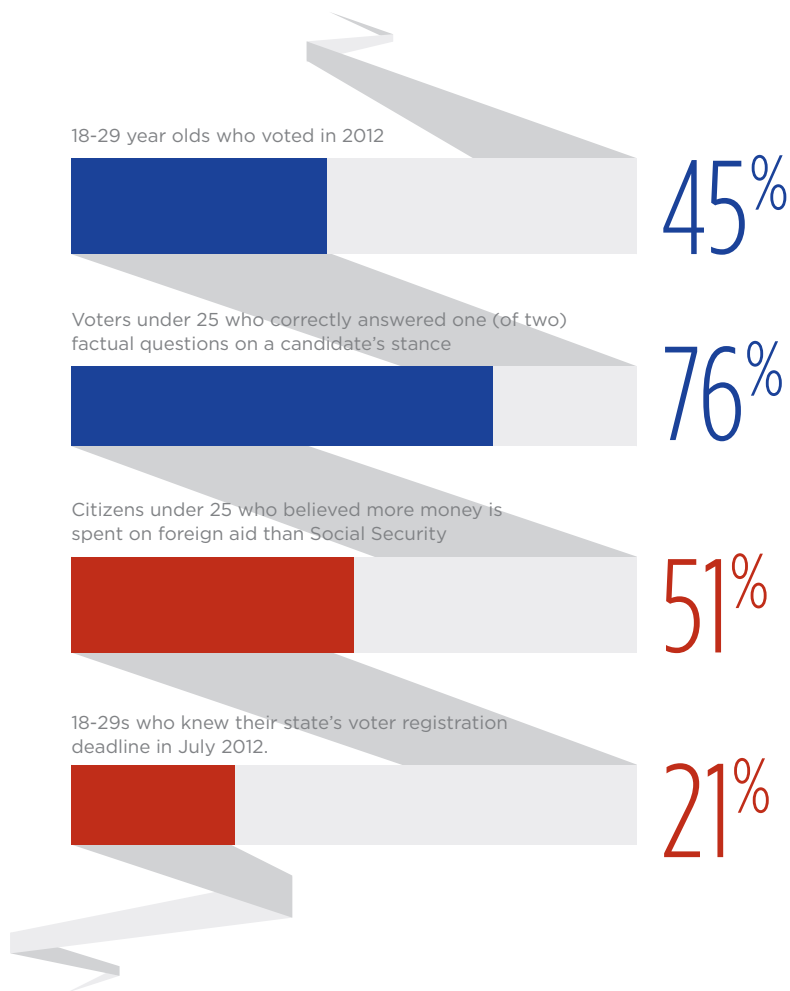
On the other hand, more than half of young people did *not* vote. And on some topics, most young people were misinformed. A majority (51.2%) of under 25-year-olds believed that the federal government spends more on foreign aid than on Social Security, when in fact Social Security costs about 20 times more. (Older adults have also been found to be misinformed on similar topics.) Our research, like many other studies, finds that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to be informed and to vote.

These shortcomings cannot be attributed to the schools alone, since families, friends, political campaigns, election officials, the mass media, social media, and community-based organizations are among the other important influences on young people. In fact, our research shows that while

schools matter, civic education must be a shared responsibility. The outcomes are acceptable only when all the relevant institutions invite, support, and educate young people to engage in politics and civic life. Improving the quality and quantity of youth participation will require new collaborations; for example, state election officials and schools should work together to make voting

Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society.

This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.



procedures understandable and to educate students about voting rules.

Some of the existing strategies for civic education are strongly supported by research and deserve to be maintained and expanded. For instance, teaching young people explicitly about politics and elections is related to higher levels of political knowledge; thus schools should be encouraged and supported to cover politics in classes that reach all students. Young adults are also more civically engaged if they discussed

underlying social and political problems in conjunction with service projects in high school.

The effects of policies are more difficult to estimate than the effects of educational strategies and practices. There are only 50 states, and they differ in many ways. We find that some policies probably have detrimental consequences. For example, young people without college experience who lived in the states with photo ID requirements were less likely to vote in 2012 than those who lived in other states, even when

we accounted for other factors that are related to voting. States with many restrictive measures in place on Election Day also saw lower turnout by non-college youth.

Research conducted for this report does not by any means rule out the benefits of some existing policies, such as mandatory courses and tests or convenient means of voter registration. However, the data collected for the Commission and previous studies suggest that none of the existing state policies has an impressive

positive effect. Certainly, the current policies in states and major school districts do not come close to achieving the goals of civic education, which are to provide *all* young people with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be active and responsible citizens. Either the policies are misconceived, the quality of implementation is inadequate, or both.

For example, we find that testing civics has no positive impact, but that could be because the tests are not well designed, teachers are not well prepared and supported to teach the material, or the curriculum is misaligned with the tests. The quality of implementation requires more attention, and there is an urgent need to experiment with wholly new strategies and policies, some of which are suggested in this report.

Despite enormous shifts in the nature of campaigns and political issues, news and electronic media, the demographics of the youth population, and education policy and voting law, changes in youth turnout and civic knowledge have been limited since 1972. The average youth turnout (for ages 18-24) in presidential years from 1972-2012 was 43.7%. The rate in 2012 was just a bit below the mean at 41.2%. Since 1972, the 50% threshold has never been breached. Meanwhile, the best national data on civic knowledge—from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment—show very small changes since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Although levels of turnout and knowledge have not changed dramatically over time, the Commission believes that the present moment is a particularly challenging one for civic educators, whether they work in schools or other settings. Civic education is a low priority for most policymakers and private funders, and the very idea of trying to engage young people in politics has become controversial. Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society—including youth themselves. Just as we should teach young people to work together to address public problems—each contributing his or her assets and ideas—so people of all ages must collaborate to improve youth civic engagement. This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion about educating the next generation of voters, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.

## Main Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the Commissioners' deliberations, which were informed by an in-depth analysis of prior research and extensive original research conducted during and after the 2012 election (see the next section for a summary of the new research). No single reform listed here is a panacea, but combining several of them would help build a supportive

### YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP AS CITIZENS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF:

- Their own parents and family members;
- Schools and colleges;
- Peer groups, both in-person and online;
- Community groups and religious congregations;
- Neighborhood and community norms;
- National news and entertainment media;
- Social media; and
- The formal political system.

Civic education is best understood as a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration.

environment for youth civic learning and engagement. The main body of the report explains whether each of these recommendations is based on extensive experience and evaluation data or is a new idea that the Commissioners advocate on a pilot basis.

### **Selected recommendations for national, state, and local policymakers**

- Make voting more accessible through reforms such as Same Day Registration; automatic registration of eligible high school students or pre-registration of 17-year-old students; and online registration with easy mobile updating.
- Implement state standards for civics that focus on developing advanced civic skills, such as deliberation and collaboration, rather than memorizing facts. Standards should be more challenging, more coherent, and more concerned with politics than the typical state standards in place today. Because these standards will be challenging, they will require both deep attention to civics within the social studies curriculum and support from other disciplines, such as English/language arts and the sciences.
- Experiment with assessments of civic skills that use portfolios of students' work instead of standardized tests. (This reform is currently being implemented in Tennessee, and the experience there will provide valuable lessons.)
- Enact state and district policies that support teachers' obligation to include discussions

of current, controversial political issues in the curriculum.

- Lower the voting age to 17 in municipal or state elections so that students can be encouraged to vote while they are taking a required civics class.
- Increase the scale and quality of national and community service programs that involve elements of deliberation, collaboration, and work on social issues, and make sure they are open to youth who do not attend college.

### **Selected recommendations for school districts and educators**

- Implement high school course requirements with valid assessments that measure higher-order skills and the application of knowledge. Courses should teach the registration and voting process explicitly and engage students in following the news and deliberating about issues.
- Adopt explicit policies that protect teachers' careers if they teach about controversial issues, as long as they encourage discussion of diverse perspectives on those issues.
- Provide professional development that goes well beyond one-day events and that is available to all teachers, including those serving disadvantaged students.<sup>2</sup>
- Use assessment systems that reward students' discussion and investigation of current events and issues.

- Assign students to read and discuss news in class and with their parents or other adults.
- Teach in detail the current voting laws that apply in the state, as many young people do not know the specifics of the laws that govern voting in their own jurisdictions.
- Emphasize youth conducting community research and producing local journalism, with the twin goals of enhancing students' communications skills and making a contribution to the community in light of the severe gap in professional reporting.
- Provide standards, curricular materials, and professional development that ensure students discuss the root causes of social problems when they participate in service-learning and ensure that student groups address social issues.
- Strengthen standards and curricula for digital media literacy and coordinate digital media literacy and civic education.
- Implement multi-player role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

### **Recommendations for families and communities**

Families and caring adults contribute to the younger generation's civic development in many ways. Families cannot be required to teach civic education, and even advice should be offered cautiously out of respect for families' autonomy and diversity. But in general, families should:

- Discuss current events (including upcoming elections) and political issues.
- Obtain and discuss high-quality news, to the extent possible.
- Encourage children to form and express their own views on current controversial issues.
- Support the discussion of controversial issues in schools.
- If eligible, vote, and talk to children about why they vote.
- Involve their children in out-of-school groups and organizations that address political and social concerns.

### Recommendations for collaboration

- Develop and support statewide coalitions that advocate for favorable policies and work to ensure that policies are well implemented. (For instance, as well as advocating a civics test, the coalition will help design a good test, align it with materials and curricula, and help provide professional development for teachers.)
- Award badges for excellence in civics. These portable, online certificates would demonstrate advanced civic skills, knowledge, and actual contributions. Badges could be designed and awarded by various institutions (e.g., schools and religious congregations), but the sectors should share ideas and set voluntary standards.
- Encourage parents to participate in civic activities within schools, e.g., by judging students' portfolios or by joining discussions of current events.

- Align states' high school civics curricula with voting reforms that encourage pre-registration in schools.
- Support the study of civics and government among college students who are headed for teaching careers.
- Hold contests and award certificates of civic achievement. Students enrolled in k-12 schools would be eligible, but community groups would participate in judging and awarding the prizes. Parents and other adults could also be eligible for awards.

## Research for this Report

To investigate the full range of influences on informed youth voting, CIRCLE organized and staffed a scholarly, nonpartisan commission. Research for the Commission was funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, W.T. Grant Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Spencer Foundation and the Youth Engagement Fund. To inform the Commission's deliberations, CIRCLE conducted the following ambitious and original research projects in 2012-2013:

- **The Youth Engagement Fund polls:** CIRCLE conducted a nationally representative online survey of 1,695 youth (ages 18-29) in June/July 2012 and surveyed 1,109 of the same youth in October 2012 to track change during the campaign season.
- **The National Youth Survey:** Immediately after the election,

CIRCLE surveyed 4,483 representative individuals (ages 18-24) by cell phone and land-line phones. At least 75 participants came from each of the 50 states and Washington, DC (75-131 per state) to allow us to estimate the effects of state policies using a statistical model. Participants of Black and Hispanic backgrounds were slightly oversampled.

- **The Teacher Survey:** In May and June 2013, CIRCLE surveyed a national sample of high school government and social studies teachers. We collected 720 complete teacher responses.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** CIRCLE interviewed 15 stakeholders (nonprofit leaders and advocates, including young adults) and coded and summarized their ideas.
- **Analysis of national data:** CIRCLE analyzed National Exit Poll and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement (CPS Voting Supplement) data to calculate youth turnout and to examine relationships between turnout and laws at the state level.
- **Policy scans:** CIRCLE conducted a full scan of all the states' civic education policies and a separate scan of their teacher certification requirements. We categorized these laws to incorporate them in statistical models of the effects of policies on youth outcomes.
- **A literature review:** CIRCLE completed a comprehensive literature review, highlights of which are briefly summarized as Appendix A.

In all, we surveyed or interviewed 6,913 people (some more than once, to detect changes over time) and scanned the relevant laws of all 50 states plus the District of Columbia for the purpose of producing this report. Additional details are available in Appendix B.

## About the Commission

The members of the Commission are among the most distinguished scholarly experts on youth political engagement, representing diverse disciplines and institutions. They studied and discussed the findings from the new research and then jointly wrote this report.

- David Campbell, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy, the University of Notre Dame
- Constance Flanagan, Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Lisa García Bedolla, Professor, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley
- Trey Grayson, Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University and former Secretary of State of Kentucky
- Eitan Hersh, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University
- Diana Hess, Senior Vice President, the Spencer

Foundation and Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison

- Joseph Kahne, Professor of Education at Mills College and Chair of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics
- Alex Keyssar, Matthew W. Stirling Jr., Professor of History and Social Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
- Michael McDevitt, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado, Boulder
- Richard G. Niemi, Don Alonzo Watson Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester
- Eric Plutzer, Professor of Political Science, Penn State University
- Debra Satz, Marta Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society and Professor of Philosophy, Stanford University
- Ismail K. White, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Ohio State University

Staff: CIRCLE provided research and other forms of support for the Commission. CIRCLE Director Peter Levine was the Principal Investigator on all the research efforts and coordinated the Commission. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, CIRCLE's Deputy Director, had primary responsibility for the research. Other key staff were: Surbhi Godsay, Researcher; Abby Kiesa, Youth Coordinator & Researcher; Kathy O'Connor,

Program Assistant; Felicia Sullivan, Senior Researcher; and Nancy Thomas, Director of CIRCLE's Initiative for the Study of Higher Education and Public Life.

# New Data on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge

Many of the statistics and specific findings presented in this report have previously been released publicly under the aegis of the Commission. But this report is the first-ever presentation of several findings, such as the following:

- ★ For young people without college experience, the existence of a photo ID law in their state predicted lower turnout in 2012, even after we included many other potential explanations in our statistical models. (Future elections may differ from 2012, when the photo ID laws were highly controversial and actively opposed.)
- ★ Allowing people to register to vote on the same day that they vote had a positive effect on youth turnout in 2012, and that finding is consistent with previous research.
- ★ About one in four high school civics or American government teachers believe that the parents of their students or other adults in their community would object if they brought discussion of politics into the classroom.
- ★ Ninety percent of teachers believe that their principal would support their decision to teach about an election (and 46% would expect strong support from principals). But only 38% of teachers think they would get strong support from their district, and only 28% think parents would strongly support them. If teachers perceive strong support, they are significantly more likely to provide an open climate for discussion in class and tend to prefer more deliberative forms of discussion. Teachers with more experience are more likely to perceive support.
- ★ Attending racially diverse high schools predicted lower electoral engagement and lower levels of informed voting, probably because it is more difficult to discuss controversial issues in diverse contexts, and individuals feel less encouragement to participate politically when others around them disagree.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, discussion of controversial current issues in school and parental support for controversial discussions diminished the negative relationship between diversity and electoral engagement.
- ★ Only eight states (California, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia) include social studies in their assessments of schools' performance, usually as a very small proportion of the schools' scores.
- ★ Only ten states (Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin) require teachers of government or civics to be certified in civics or government.



# AUTHENTIC YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A Guide for Municipal Leaders



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the country, municipal leaders are discovering one of their greatest assets: the youth of their city. Increasingly, youth are working with elected officials and other city leaders to tackle the important issues of local government. More and more young people are also discovering that their voices matter to their communities, and that they can make their communities better places to live.

Elected officials and civic leaders find that when they offer meaningful opportunities for youth to be engaged in their communities, more young people participate and encourage their peers to do the same. In addition to engaging the next generation of civic leaders, cities already using this approach have realized many of the following benefits:

- Budget savings and revenue generation
- Increased support for city initiatives
- Improved policies and programs for youth
- Identification as a youth-friendly community
- Improved indicators of well-being among youth

Recognizing the importance of this work, the National League of Cities (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) has created a framework to support cities as they work to promote youth civic engagement. Through a year-long process of research, interviews and dialogue with city leaders, the YEF Institute has brought together the strongest theory and the best practices of localities to provide guidance on the elements that make youth engagement in government meaningful and sustainable.

The term used in this guide to describe this approach to youth involvement in government is Authentic Youth Civic Engagement (AYCE). Under this framework, young people...

- are seen as valuable participants in the work of local government;
- are prepared to take on meaningful roles in addressing relevant issues; and
- work in partnership with adults who respect, listen to and support them.

Authentic Youth Civic Engagement invites young people to participate in the democratic process through meaningful roles in public policy, planning and decision-making, which can lead to improved outcomes for youth and the community. AYCE thrives in a climate of reciprocity and respect where young people, in partnership with adults, are prepared and supported to tackle relevant issues and effect change.

The AYCE framework presents four critical elements for a successful initiative:

A **Setting** in which the civic climate of the community is welcoming and inviting to youth, acknowledging their role in public policy, planning and decision-making.

A **Structure** in which the organization and system that supports AYCE meets both the needs of the local government and the interests of the young people.

A **Strategy** that offers a wide range of activities and provides youth with a breadth and depth of meaningful opportunities for participation in local government.

**Support** from adult allies, both within and outside local government, which enables the young people involved in AYCE efforts to have a real impact on issues that concern them.

This guide will help local elected officials and other city leaders address each of the critical elements of this AYCE framework. Like any other new initiative in local government, there is no magic recipe or one-size-fits-all approach. Success comes from blending the unique assets of a city with the collective knowledge and best practice from across the country. Local officials can use this framework to find workable solutions for their own community.

First, an assessment tool will help municipal leaders introduce the idea of the AYCE framework into their city. To get started, officials are encouraged to:

- Convene a small group of stakeholders and include some youth;
- Learn about current youth civic engagement efforts in the city;
- Talk about the issues raised in the assessment and answer some tough questions;
- Agree on a common definition and framework for AYCE; and
- Invest in some training.

This guide then describes each of the AYCE critical elements in detail, highlighting actions that can increase the likelihood of success.

The Setting section reinforces how important it is for elected officials and community leaders to believe youth can help local government build a better community. It presents numerous tips to promote that belief and act on it.

The Structure section explores the various options that municipal leaders can consider to organize and manage the city's approach to AYCE.

The Strategy section describes how to make a wide range of opportunities available and accessible to a broad diversity of youth that allow them to have an impact on important issues.

The Support section outlines how adults, within and outside of local government, can work as colleagues with youth and build bridges between them and the adult world.

Finally, a Tools and Resources section will connect city officials with ideas, strategies and other local leaders around the country who can share information and support for this challenging and rewarding work.

## What Can Municipal Leaders Do to Lay the Groundwork for AYCE to be Successful and Sustainable?

In most cities, mayors and city councilmembers will serve as the champions, initiators and conveners for the creation of a youth civic engagement system within local government. What happens next will vary from city to city. Sometimes elected officials set the vision and then turn the implementation over to city management, department heads, other staff or community-based organizations. In other cases, they choose to have a more hands-on role in designing and implementing the strategies.

Either way, a small but diverse stakeholder group can aid in the design and implementation of any city planning or community improvement strategy, bringing its best thinking and resources to bear in tackling the issue. This steering or working group is composed of people who understand the potential impacts of any strategies that may be created.

Because young people are at the center of the AYCE approach, it is essential for municipal leaders to work closely with youth regardless of the method they choose to create or enhance the city's youth civic engagement efforts. Young people must be seen as "experts" in this topic and included in the planning process. For municipal leaders, this role requires additional time and some training in order to work effectively with teens in a partnership.

## First Steps for the Elected Official and/or Stakeholder Group

A key word related to Authentic Youth Civic Engagement is "intentional." Like any other city improvement strategy, AYCE should be carefully researched and considered. The mayor, along with his or her advisors or the newly formed Stakeholder Group, has three basic steps before embarking on implementation.

### TIPS FOR CREATING A YOUTH AND ADULT STAKEHOLDER GROUP FOR AYCE

A small, working group of people who are most passionate about creating a youth-friendly city will help municipal leaders get started on their AYCE initiative. Try to have no greater a ratio than two or three adults to one young person.

**Adults:** Scan the city council, city staff or community leaders to find adults who:

- are willing to see young people as resources who can help the city.
- have the ability to be part of a team that focuses on what is already working locally and what works in other cities.

**Youth:** Enlist the support of adults in the city, schools or community-based youth groups who can help identify youth who:

- are representative of the diversity of the city's teenage population.
- have the ability to participate in a discussion, analyze issues and offer recommendations.

**Facilitator:** Look within the city staff, schools, universities or community-based organizations to find someone with the expertise to:

- support the group to complete their tasks in a timely manner.
- assist the youth and adults to work together in effective cross-generational conversations.

The Support section of this booklet describes the characteristics of an adult ally who will most likely have connections with the youth you want to involve at this point in your process. The Tools and Resources section provides a list of national organizations that may provide additional assistance.

### **Step 1: Learn about current youth civic engagement efforts in the city.**

The Tools and Resources section of this booklet contains a “Perceptions Inventory” that can be used by city leaders to assess the current state of youth civic engagement in their own communities. This tool provides a series of questions that are grouped according to the definition and critical elements of authentic youth civic engagement. Responses can be plotted on a chart and the results will present a visual portrait of the current status of youth engagement in a city.

A rich dialogue can result if a variety of individuals, including city leaders, youth workers and young people, complete the assessment. There is bound to be a wide diversity of opinion, which can lead to valuable insights.

An additional assessment strategy can involve young people identifying current youth engagement efforts in the community. While it is helpful to collect a list of all the services the city provides for youth and the wide variety of organizations or activities they can join, this step focuses specifically on the youth engagement activities that connect young people with the work of local government. Through surveys or canvassing their community, youth can gather baseline information on two important questions:

- What activities are already taking place?
- How do youth perceive the existing opportunities for engagement?

### **Step 2: Talk about the issues raised in the assessment and answer some tough questions.**

What did the overall assessment say about the city’s readiness and capacity to do this work? A candid dialogue is important to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the city’s current approach to involving youth in local government.

Much of the valuable feedback will come from young people. However, adults must also consider these essential questions:

- What level of interest exists among city leaders and other adults to engage youth in local government? Why would the city want to do this?
- What is the opinion of city leaders about the roles youth could play?
- How willing are adult leaders to open up their decision-making process to youth involvement?

### **Step 3: Agree on a common definition and framework for AYCE.**

The following sections of this publication elaborate on the framework for supporting the authentic engagement of young people in public policy, planning and decision-making. If everyone involved has read about and understands the framework prior to moving forward, this becomes the time to decide whether or not to proceed with the process. The following questions may help city leaders find consensus on this decision:

- Does everyone share a long-term vision for implementing the AYCE framework in the city?
- Does everyone agree that there are potential strategies the city can undertake that will create or improve the setting, structure, strategy and support for engaging youth in local government?

## **Next Steps**

The assessments of current youth engagement efforts have been completed. Youth have shared their ideas. There is a general understanding among local officials and key stakeholders that this new endeavor involves a lot of planning. People seem excited and ready to *do something*. So what to do?

This is the time to dive into the AYCE framework and begin to apply it to your city. Next steps might include expanding the initial stakeholder group, or turning the process over to specific staff or youth development experts. It also might be

time to invest in some training to ensure that the planners of the city's AYCE strategy have the skills necessary to lead the development of this new initiative (see the Frequently Asked Questions section for more information about resources on youth-adult partnership training).

One approach is to look at a critical element that showed up with lower scores on your Perceptions Inventory and other assessments and choose a few strategies to improve that area. Often the act of concentrating on one of the critical elements of AYCE will open doors in the other elements as well.

Another approach is to design one strategy in each of the critical areas that could be easily accomplished and provide some initial results. It is important, especially working with youth, to have some immediate successes that help generate positive reactions to the city's early attempts at youth engagement.

Still another approach is to concentrate your initial efforts in a district or neighborhood where there is already some activity and youth civic engagement might be well-received. This type of pilot approach can provide some valuable lessons that will be helpful in spreading the framework citywide.

In addition to the tips in the following sections of this document, the Tools and Resources and Frequently Asked Questions sections may provide additional ideas on logical next steps.

The best advice for a new AYCE initiative is "go slow to go fast." Many cities have a tendency to use their initial enthusiasm to tackle complicated social issues. Some imagine high-level youth councils or youth serving on numerous boards or commissions. The reality is that early successes are important, so it may be best to select one or two feasible strategies to get everyone on board and establish a basis for future work.

No matter who is planning the implementation and which initial strategy is pursued, it is essential that elected officials and other city leaders, as the champions and conveners for the AYCE initiative, remain involved and committed to the process.

## A RIVER CITY STORY: MAYOR SMITH CHAMPIONS AYCE

Mayor Smith is trudging up the two flights of stairs to his small office overlooking the River City square. He has avoided the elevator today to grab just a few more moments alone with his thoughts.

Ever since he was elected three years ago to lead the seven-member City Council, Mayor Smith has used this stairwell time to ponder the challenges of his small Midwestern city. Today, his thoughts turn to an article in the morning paper citing the city's loss of jobs and population.

The fact that River City's 40,000 residents are feeling the pinch of challenging economic times, recently made worse by the closing of an important manufacturing plant, was not news. What made this article different was the reporter's slant on the local young adult population. To hear this version of the issue, they were leaving the city in droves.

By the time he reaches his office door, Mayor Smith has an idea, and it involves the city's 3,000 teens. What if high school-aged youth got involved in the city's economic development plans? Would they care? If they did, what would they think was important? Could they be persuaded to remain in River City? Could involving them in this issue have any impact on maintaining jobs and population?

Mayor Smith knows this will take a lot of work, and the support of at least three of his fellow councilmembers, but it is worth a try...

*continued on page 15*

# | THE SETTING:

## Welcome Youth in Local Government

Do elected officials and community leaders believe youth can help local government build a better community? Do they promote that belief as well as act on it?

*“Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.”<sup>1</sup>*

**John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight**

co-directors, Asset Building Community Development Institute

The above quote by community development pioneers presents an innovative way for local government and community leaders to view residents. Some localities have found very effective ways of engaging adult citizens to share their capabilities in the work of local government, yet far fewer have learned how to expand this engagement to younger citizens.

While an AYCE framework may appear simple, its depth comes from the requirement that people — both youth and adults — change the way they think, believe and behave. A prevailing general attitude in many cities views young people as recipients of what adults have to provide or teach them. While there is much value to the view of youth as recipients, this perspective presents problems when adults are unable to also value youth for the contributions they have to offer.

In a typical government setting, adults may view youth as problems to be fixed, a vulnerable population to be protected or a special interest group that draws a disproportionate amount of local resources. Adopting an AYCE framework challenges these views. In an AYCE framework, youth are seen as:

- Problem-solvers;
- Contributors to community safety and well-being;
- Designers, planners and evaluators; and
- Grant-makers.

Authentic youth civic engagement can flourish in a setting that is conducive to citizen engagement in general and, specifically, goes the extra step to see youth as part of the community. The setting of the AYCE framework is the environment — the social and political climate — that makes young people believe they are welcomed as civic participants.

To what extent are city leaders — mayors, councilmembers, managers, department heads, school and civic leaders — willing to open up their decision-making process to the voice of young people? This will vary from city to city, and each city needs to determine the level of youth engagement that is most practical for them. Often, the more adults participate in an intergenerational committee or learn about fresh ideas from youth presentations, the more open they are to continue including youth in municipal affairs.

<sup>1</sup> Kretzmann, John P., and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, 1993.

## What Can Municipal Leaders Do to Create the Setting?

### *Acknowledge youth as active civic participants.*

In order for youth engagement to be authentic, adults must see young people as resources. Thus, the first step in welcoming youth into local government is to believe that they belong there. Local leaders may ask themselves, “Is there a current issue facing the city that could benefit from a youth perspective?” Elected officials can capitalize on any existing local civic engagement efforts happening among adults by extending an open invitation to youth. City leaders can also build young people’s interest in local government from the ground up. Most cities have numerous civic and volunteer opportunities for youth that can be connected to municipal issues.

Youth are extremely interested in issues that have a direct impact on their lives, such as safety in their neighborhoods, curricular and extracurricular offerings at their schools and the presence or lack of parks and recreation facilities. However, it is a mistake to assume that young people are not interested in other issues as well. In many cities, they take leading roles in shaping environmental policy, advocating for health services and getting out the vote at election time.

### *Create youth-friendly municipal processes.*

Taking a fresh look at municipal processes from a youth engagement perspective may uncover ordinances, policies or practices that inhibit youth participation. City council meetings, public hearings and other processes for soliciting citizen input may not lead youth to believe they are welcomed participants.

Under the guidance of the mayor or other local officials, cities can examine the details of typical citizen engagement opportunities. Times and locations, sign-up procedures, complexity of information, formalities and unspoken expectations all may be off-putting to youth. Are they absolutely necessary, or is there another way to accomplish the same objectives? A council-appointed working group of youth and adults can recommend workable strategies to change or adapt local procedures for civic engagement.

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*“It is essential to have an openness on the part of elected officials. The word ‘welcomed’ is important to use about youth so it implies to policymakers a serious, sincere commitment.”*

— Elected official, California

*“They expect you to have a voice. It makes me proud to be part of my city.”*

— Youth, Virginia

*“Public officials must see that many of these problems, like the dropout issue, cannot be solved without youth at the table.”*

— Adult ally, Tennessee

*“Authentic engagement is very important — it means we have to look them in the face when we are making decisions.”*

— Elected official, California

In some cases, cities create strategies specifically for youth input. The most common of these is the summit or speakout — a sort of youth-friendly public hearing. These activities, planned in partnership with youth, can be focused on one issue of youth concern or open-ended to determine the topics youth want their city to address.

### *Listen to youth voices and open strong lines of communication.*

Communication is essential for youth to participate in city government. There are several key components to effective communication. First, nothing can kill enthusiasm for engagement faster than youth believing that their participation did not matter. If a public process is opened to or created specifically for youth, it is important that there be some kind of feedback loop so that young people know their ideas were taken into consideration. Websites, newsletters or messages to youth leadership groups can be helpful mechanisms for following up with youth who participated. Youth who are in a position to represent their peers can be selected to follow up with city leaders as work progresses on a given issue.

It is also important to make expectations clear. Some youth believe that by merely presenting their ideas to city leaders, their suggestions will be implemented. They may interpret a lack of immediate results as an indication that their voices were not heard, resulting in disillusionment. Elected officials can help youth understand that their ideas were considered by honestly explaining the process and the reasons for the city's decisions.

Elected officials also play a vital role in convincing youth they are being taken seriously. Sometimes public officials do not know what to say when youth present an issue or concern to them because they do not want to appear argumentative or unfriendly. So, instead of addressing the youths' concerns, mayors or councilmembers end up complimenting the speakers on how they look or perform. Youth appreciate compliments, but the mayor or city council can also demonstrate that they are listening by asking questions, noticing areas of alignment with city policy and acknowledging the young people's ideas.

### *Promote youth leadership.*

Mayors and other elected officials have the advantage of the “bully pulpit” to establish public clarity about “how we are going to do business in our city.” They have a unique vehicle to intentionally embed the idea of youth engagement into a whole range of planning and decision-making situations.

Public proclamations, documents and policies can help institutionalize the place of youth at the decision-making tables of the city. When proposals are presented to the coun-

#### 10 REASONS WHY YOUTH SAY THEY DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

10. Think their voice would not be heard.
9. Lack transportation.
8. Difficult to balance job, school, family and other time commitments.
7. Parents object, or general lack of parental support.
6. Activity is held at an inconvenient time (during school hours, on college prep testing day, etc.).
5. Issue to be tackled seems too big.
4. Issue to be tackled is not interesting to youth.
3. No other youth are doing it.
2. Believe that, in general, adults do not take youth seriously.
1. No one asked!

cil, officials can inquire as to how youth were consulted or involved. Elected officials can urge city boards and commissions to consult with a youth group (such as a local youth council, if available) so that young people can weigh in on new policies or initiatives. If local officials are making appointments to a new board or committee, they can stress the importance of appointing youth.

Strong partnerships with schools, universities, the faith community, youth-serving agencies and neighborhood groups can help local government create a community norm that supports and sustains a broader youth engagement agenda. Reinforcing local government efforts with similar actions in the rest of the public sector and in the nonprofit sector can enhance the civic environment.

The more public officials promote youth engagement, the more it will become a reality throughout the community.

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"Outside of political campaigns, the only outlet for civic activism in my community was through local government."*

— Youth, Wisconsin

*"We need to make the case about why it matters to the mayor and to the city. It is important to focus on economic development and sustaining democracy. Elected officials need to come to see the importance of youth being in that process."*

— University professor, New Hampshire

*"The youth just keep showing up, and finally it becomes part of the city culture."*

— Adult ally, Massachusetts

*"We must give youth the same credibility as other community groups and legitimize their participation."*

— Elected official, Colorado

*"This is very doable, in fact it is already being done. We are creating an environment where kids are less likely to get in trouble."*

— Elected official, Minnesota

## On the Map

### **Boston, Mass.: Putting the "Mayor" in Mayor's Youth Council**

The sustained success of the Boston Mayor's Youth Council is due in no small part to the emphatic support of its primary champion, Mayor Thomas M. Menino. At first, city agencies and partner organizations were uncomfortable with Mayor Menino's insistence that youth be included in important decision-making processes. After 15 years in office, however, the mayor's once startling requirement has become a pervasive and self-perpetuating expectation throughout Boston. As Patty McMahon, director of the Mayor's Youth Council, explains, "It has been institutionalized... You'd have to involve young people from this point forward."

### **Hampton, Va.: A Community Norm that Youth are Seen as Resources**

Everywhere you look throughout local government in Hampton, there are young people taking on meaningful roles in planning, policy and decision-making. Youth are a fixture in City Hall, and City Council and the Planning Commission expect regular reports from high school students working on the youth component of the Community Plan. Other decision-making bodies invite youth involve-

ment and input through a variety of strategies. With a successful long-term focus on citizen engagement, it was not too much of a stretch for Hampton leaders in the early 1990s to extend the invitation to the youth population. Each successive mayor and city manager affirms his or her expectation of youth engagement to city departments, the school division and outside agencies, and continues to promote the benefits in public forums.

### **Greenville, S.C.: Intentional Planning to Engage Youth**

In 2008, Councilwoman Diane Smock spearheaded an effort to develop an AYCE initiative in Greenville. When Mayor Knox White joined the Mayors' Action Challenge for Children and Families, he committed to completing and implementing an AYCE initiative by August 2009. More than 100 youth and adults joined the AYCE initiative, which is managed jointly by the City of Greenville and the United Way of Greenville County. These participants divided into teams to identify and develop opportunities for youth engagement in every sector of the community, from schools and neighborhoods to community-based organizations and city government. By taking this strategic and inclusive approach, the City of Greenville has ensured that rather than being limited to a single program, the AYCE initiative will create lasting change to the community's civic culture.

#### **A RIVER CITY STORY: MAYOR SMITH CHAMPIONS AYCE**

##### **THREE MONTHS LATER...**

It is the first meeting of River City's Pride team and Mayor Smith is excited. The past three months have been busy. Council's new "Conversations on a Prosperous River City" held throughout the community have been successful. The youth session far exceeded his expectations. Mayor Smith remembers how surprised most of the adults were by the passion of the teens about economic issues and their enthusiasm for participating.

Tonight's meeting will convene a new organization — business and industry representatives, educators, elected officials, parents and youth — that will promote investment in River City as a great place to live, work and play. There is a buzz in the room and Mayor Smith notes with some satisfaction that the reporter who wrote the article about youth leaving the city is currently in the corner surrounded by teens. He hopes they are describing their ideas for a video project that will interview citizens on what makes River City great.

As he takes his place at the head of the table, Mayor Smith makes a mental note to remember the tips he learned about making a meeting youth-friendly. He knows that adult committee work can be very challenging for youth, and he is committed to helping these kids stay engaged. "Welcome everyone!" he begins, nodding toward the youth representatives. "Let's start with introductions."

*continued on page 22*

# | THE STRUCTURE:

## Develop an Infrastructure that Supports Youth Participation in Government

### Is there a workable structure that matches the interests of youth with the needs of the city?

A municipality's efforts to engage youth occurs within the structure that city leaders establish. Every community's AYCE structure will be different, and city leaders must balance what will work for their local government with the passions and challenges of their city's youth. In listening to the experiences of cities across the country, the overriding theme is: *AYCE is not just a program.*

There are two important lessons in this advice. First, the "not just a program" description means that AYCE is an approach, or a way of looking at young people that permeates the perception of the adults and youth in a community. How a city structures its AYCE initiative can promote that mindset and support numerous opportunities for youth. The location and oversight of the AYCE initiative matter.

Secondly, youth and adults both stress that if civic engagement is to be authentic, young people will need more than a single opportunity to have a role in their community. It is important to create multiple pathways for youth to become involved and make a difference. The structure of a city's AYCE initiative must support a system of opportunities, as described in greater detail in the next section.

Using the definition of AYCE as guidance, how can the organizational structure of the initiative ensure that youth:

- are seen as valuable participants in the work of local government?
- are prepared to take on meaningful roles in addressing relevant issues?
- work in partnership with adults who respect, listen to and support them?

Examples across the country range from initiatives that are run almost entirely by a city department (or in some cases a mayor) to those run almost entirely by an outside youth development agency. The common thread among them is someone serving as champion and a coordinator who possesses the knowledge and skills to effectively engage youth.

If the initiative is based within the government organization, it must support youth in maintaining a perspective that genuinely reflects their peers rather than only that of local officials. It must rely on partnerships within the community to accomplish any of the tasks that are beyond the capacity of local government.

If the initiative is based in the community, it must support youth in maintaining an effective relationship with local government that helps them navigate city hall and remain connected to information pertinent to their work. It must rely on strong agreements that keep the initiative relevant in the eyes of decision-makers.

If the initiative is structured as a joint venture between government and community agencies, it must coordinate the diverse perspectives and approaches of two or more groups, blending the skills, resources and perspectives into one inclusive, workable strategy.

## What Can Municipal Leaders Do to Create the Structure?

*Choose the organizational setup that is right for your city.*

Municipal leaders and their partners may consider following a four-step process for determining what type of infrastructure will best meet the needs of a local AYCE initiative:

### Step One: List the Factors for Success

What will it take for the AYCE initiative to be successful in your city? What qualities of its location, organization or governance could give youth the best opportunities to impact the city? The sample chart on the right lists a number of considerations that will be important in making this decision.

### Step Two: List the Potential Structures

Create a list of potential structures for an AYCE initiative for your local government. Consider possible locations, lines of authority and the composition of the initiative. Options may already be available in your community or may need to be created if they do not currently exist. Here are some examples of structures that cities are currently using:

- **Designated:** A stand-alone department or office focuses on youth issues, including AYCE.
- **Embedded:** The city manager's or mayor's office, or a department that has another (hopefully related) mission, coordinates the initiative.
- **Contractual:** The city establishes a contract with an outside entity for operation of the initiative in a partnership model.
- **Multi-jurisdictional:** A citywide policy commission (e.g., a health or youth and families commission or an economic development initiative) assigns staff to support a youth agenda within its area of focus.
- The city uses other ideas or a combination of any of the previous options.

| FACTORS FOR SUCCESS OF AN AYCE INITIATIVE                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Direct connection to city council, and other decision-making bodies                              |
| Sufficient authority to convene                                                                  |
| Existence/visibility of an adult champion                                                        |
| Strong orientation to youth development and engagement                                           |
| Strong orientation to civics and participatory governance                                        |
| Capacity for training, recruitment and support of youth in civic engagement opportunities        |
| Access to a diverse youth population                                                             |
| Ability to rally support among city departments and throughout the local government organization |
| Ability to create partnerships throughout the community                                          |
| Capacity for project management                                                                  |
| Flexibility in approach and operations                                                           |
| Cost effectiveness                                                                               |
| Other                                                                                            |

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"The challenge for city leaders is how do we make a place for youth within all the issues a city is facing?"*

— Elected official, Colorado

*"I couldn't believe during my freshman year of college that the kids from other cities had never met their mayor. I was the only one who had ever heard of a Comprehensive Plan."*

— Youth, Virginia

*"We need to be careful about expectations. Are there really meaningful roles? Do we really listen? It's important to not start something or give the appearance of being on board if that's not the case."*

— Elected official, California

*"As with adults, youth need to know what's in it for them. Are there some direct benefits to their participation? Can they earn credit, receive stipends, meet new people, have the chance to travel or speak in public?"*

— Adult ally, Maine

### Step Three: Consider the Benefits of Each Option

Each option for an AYCE structure that a city is considering should be matched against the list of contributors to success to see the benefits it can provide. Local officials can use the list of factors for success as a checklist of criteria to assess each potential structure. Another option is to create a matrix (see the sample in the Tools and Resources section) to determine which criteria match each potential option.

### Step Four: Analyze and Determine the Best Fit

Review your completed lists or chart to determine the best combination of factors for a successful AYCE initiative in your city. Often, the best option to consider will be the one that appears to meet the greatest number of criteria on the list of needed qualities and capacity. In some cases, there may be one or two criteria on the list that are significantly more important than the others that will determine the choice of structure. Once the choice for a structure is made, the missing qualities and capacities will need to be addressed in other ways.

### *Enlist other partners for missing expertise, resources or connections.*

Ultimately, any structure created will rely on some partnerships. City officials can work with a variety of local entities including nonprofit agencies, intermediary organizations, schools, chambers of commerce, foundations and colleges and universities to take on various components of the AYCE initiative. No one entity — not even local government — has the capacity to do this effectively on its own.

If the initiative will be located within local government, outside organizations can provide assistance with training, surveying, recruitment, transportation, pooling resources and co-sponsorship of events. If the initiative is to be located within an outside organization, cities can provide access to key decision-makers and information that will ensure the youth participants can achieve what they seek to accomplish.

### *Connect youth to key decision-makers.*

If the AYCE initiative's activities are located too far from the "action" of city hall, or if authority for the initiative is buried too far down in the organizational chart, the initiative may not be taken seriously and young people will miss out on opportunities to contribute. The structure of the initiative can allow for one-time or ongoing interactions with city leaders, as well as official and informal connections to the decision-making processes. The following questions may help city officials consider effective ways to connect youth to decision-makers:

- Will there be a youth council or advisory group that has access to the mayor or city councilmembers?
- Is there an official way to bring youth input into strategic planning, budget deliberations, capital improvement plans and evaluation of city services?
- Is there a way of connecting a group of youth to the work of specific departments?
- Are there some open opportunities for youth to raise their concerns and ideas?

### *Pay attention to barriers that might keep youth from participating.*

All decisions about structure that the city faces must take into consideration the barriers that exist for the very youth who are being invited to participate. Welcoming youth means more than greeting them with a smile when they come to a meeting. It means setting up a structure that sends a message that they belong.

Paying attention to logistics — where and when meetings are held, if food or other incentives are offered, availability of transportation, etc. — will help attract youth participation. Adults might not take into account that youth do not have secretaries to remind them of meetings or office equipment to produce reports. Some do not have computers or newspapers in their homes.

The best strategy to address these barriers is the ongoing, intentional and positive outreach to engage all youth, including those outside the usual line-up of high achievers. If there is a wide range of opportunities for youth with various interests and abilities, and a friendly adult ally to welcome them, youth are more likely to participate.

Community-based organizations that specialize in working with youth from socially vulnerable settings can be valuable partners in the recruitment and support of youth who might not be attracted

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"Creating a workable structure is doable, but we need to think about how it can be done differently. For example, the use of newer communication techniques may eliminate some previous barriers."*

— Adult ally, California

*"We need to be aware of their schedules — youth have a lot of commitments. But that's why we need to stress the importance of civic engagement, so it can become a priority as well."*

— Elected official, California

*"Part of an assessment is recognizing whether there is an authentic demand for the role youth can play. If the demand isn't there, the other part of the work is to create it."*

— Adult ally, New Hampshire

to an activity in local government. If harder-to-reach youth have participated in a community-based civic activity or service project, they may be more open to participating in another structured activity.

### *Learn from the experiences of other communities.*

The National League of Cities (NLC), through its Institute for Youth, Education and Families, routinely collects information on best practices and the experiences of cities across the country. City officials can benefit greatly from reaching out to other experienced cities such as those listed in the Tools and Resource section of this booklet. There is also a wealth of information to be found in additional NLC resources such as the Youth Participation Advisors Network (YPAN), an action kit for municipal leaders on *Promoting Youth Participation* and a 2009 report on *The State of City Leadership for Children and Families*.

## 10 WAYS TO KEEP YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AUTHENTIC

10. The opportunities are meaningful, not just made-up work.
9. Youth have access to decision-makers in official settings.
8. Enough time is allocated for youth to learn the issues and complete projects.
7. Adult-driven initiatives or groups try to maintain a ratio of four to six adults to every young person.
6. Youth-driven initiatives try to maintain a ratio of four to eight youth to every adult.
5. Training and skill-building are built into all projects.
4. Training and skill-building match the opportunities youth will tackle.
3. Opportunities are connected as a system; youth can move easily from one to another.
2. Any opportunity balances learning, work and fun.
1. Adults want youth at the table because they add value, not because it will be good for them.

Many local youth engagement initiatives receive a boost by participating in youth delegate programs at NLC's annual Congress of Cities and Exposition in the fall and the Congressional City Conference in the spring. Elected officials and youth delegates alike return to their communities inspired by their peers, full of new ideas and comforted that many other cities are confronting similar problems and have similar hopes for their youth.

## On the Map

### **Grand Rapids, Mich.: A Unique City-School Partnership**

In Grand Rapids, youth civic engagement enjoys a place of prominence in both the city and school district. The two entities collaborate through Our Community's Children, formerly the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families, to offer a broad range of youth development and youth engagement programs and services, including the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC). Under this partnership, the school district contributes not only financial support, but also provides class credits for the MYC's special curriculum in leadership and government. Our Community's Children Director Lynn Heemstra sits on the top management team within city government and has guided the city through a youth master planning process. She acknowledges that the positioning of her department allows Grand Rapids to be inclusive in bringing to the table the voices of youth who are affected by city policy.

### **Chicago, Ill.: When Traditional Youth Councils Will Not Work, Invent Something New**

The Mikva Challenge, a nonprofit working to expand civic education and participation among low-income Chicago youth, operates an innovative system of issue-based, policy-making youth councils. Because of the challenges presented by creating a single youth council to represent such a large and diverse city, the Mikva Challenge created a unique approach that establishes a variety of councils in schools and in local government. Based in the five high schools with the highest rates of violence in Chicago, Peace and Leadership Councils research local causes of youth violence and provide their school administrations with policy recommendations. Within city government itself, the Education Council, Teen Health Council, Youth Safety Council and Out-of-School Time Council work closely with city agencies and lead officials to impact policy. Youth leaders on these councils conduct research, produce reports and outreach materials for their peers and facilitate trainings on youth-adult partnerships in Chicago Public Schools.

#### **A RIVER CITY STORY: MAYOR SMITH CHAMPIONS AYCE**

##### **SIX MONTHS LATER...**

The city's new youth coordinator is being introduced at a City Council work session. She will work with the economic development department's Pride team to make sure the youth members have a strong voice, and she will coordinate the activities of the three new youth projects detailed on her PowerPoint slide.

Mayor Smith scans the room for the reactions of his fellow councilmembers and the public. He hopes they will not see the plan as too ambitious, but in the past three months he has learned the importance of having at least three approaches for youth engagement that provide a continuum of opportunities for action, advisory or representation roles, and shared leadership.

The Action Team, an active and enthusiastic group of teens, is already well on their way to creating their video interviewing citizens on what makes River City great. They have also been surveying youth about where in town they spend their money and canvassing the community to find businesses and organizations that want to help with the initiative.

The Advocacy team has been cautious in their approach. They spent time learning about how decisions are made in the city and what factors influence local leaders' attitudes and policies on promoting economic progress. They have talked about their concerns that economic prosperity may not be a reality for some of River City's youth. Some of the members have been appointed to a new curriculum review committee for the high school, and others are approaching the workforce development board about greater youth input into training programs.

The Innovation Team is a small group of youth that has pledged a great deal of time for the Pride initiative. They have researched models for youth entrepreneurship and mentoring programs and, along with members of the Chamber of Commerce, are creating a business plan for implementation.

As the presentation concludes, and applause ripples through the room, Mayor Smith is glad he remembered to ask the schools to be part of the initiative. It was their idea to offer credit incentives to students for attending public meetings. The youth have been so involved in the presentation, he knows even the biggest skeptics on council will be impressed.

*continued on page 29*

# | THE STRATEGY:

## Create Meaningful Opportunities for Youth to Make a Difference

Is there a continuum of opportunities available and accessible to a broad diversity of youth that allows them to have an impact on important issues?

Keeping in mind that AYCE is not a program, how does a city begin to offer meaningful civic opportunities to its youth? Ultimately, AYCE would look like a system of opportunities throughout the community that connects young people to the work of local government. However, this does not happen overnight, and cities can begin their initiatives in many different places. Then, combined with a welcoming civic climate, strong adult allies and a functional and sustainable infrastructure, municipal leaders can eventually build a sound strategy into a long-term system for engaging youth.

With a fundamental understanding of an AYCE system, cities can choose the beginning or expansion points that meet their needs. The model below has been helpful to many cities in building that system.

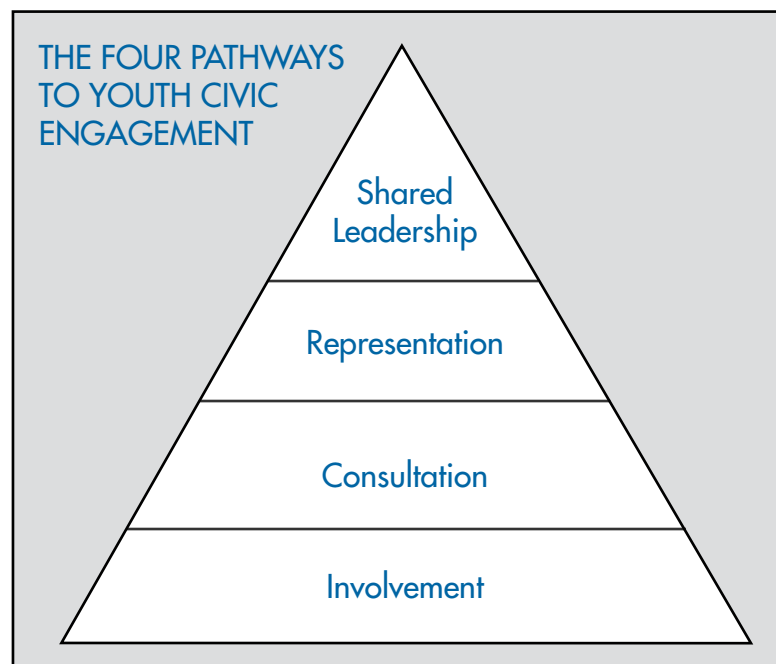
If an issue is important to youth, they will participate. Yet, just like adults, what young people do about that issue will vary depending on their interests, availability, skills or the issue itself. Like adults, many youth want active, hands-on activities that can be accomplished in short-term settings. Others are interested in longer commitments that provide increasing opportunity to share ideas and influence decisions.

To make the work of local government approachable for a broad diversity of youth, cities can create a continuum of opportunities for engagement that increase the extent to which youth share authority and accountability in policy, planning and decision-making. It is important to note that AYCE avoids “tokenism” in which one or two youth are consulted or invited with little expectation that anyone will heed their suggestions. Instead, it may be helpful to visualize a pyramid with four pathways of engagement:

### The Four Pathways to Youth Engagement

**Involvement:** Youth actively participate in volunteer opportunities and meetings initiated by adults, and have input on the strategies and day-to-day operations, or take on projects within ongoing city initiatives.

**Consultation:** Adult officials create intentional settings, such as advisory groups, in which youth give input and advice



on important issues facing their neighborhoods, schools, community and local government, while the adults retain the authority to make the final decision.

**Representation:** Selected youth gain the opportunity to participate in ongoing municipal work on behalf of their peers, with the ability to help set the agenda and vote on a government-sponsored activity (e.g., through a city board or commission).

**Shared leadership:** Youth share positions of authority with adults as colleagues and share accountability for the goals and outcomes of the activity.

The AYCE pathways are positioned as a pyramid not to imply that any one has a greater value than another, but rather to demonstrate that activities increase in their depth and intensity as they move from the base to the apex. The pyramid also demonstrates that the potential number of opportunities and the corresponding number of youth involved tends to decrease as the type of involvement increases in its complexity.

Most cities already offer a number of opportunities within the Involvement pathway. AYCE encourages cities to build on the experience of involving youth to explore other pathways that create a permanent place for more youth to participate in city decision-making. Each of the following suggestions can be the basis for beginning the strategy or building on it.

## What Can Municipal Leaders Do to Create the Strategy?

*Use the four pathways of engagement to ensure a broad continuum of opportunities.*

Cities can create activities for youth participation that will be meaningful for young people, relate to their interests and skills and have an impact on the city. In an AYCE system, one size definitely does not fit all. The broader the range of opportunities, the more youth will participate — particularly when young people can move easily from one type of opportunity into another.

Involvement strategies are a good first step to put youth in touch with municipal, school, neighborhood and community decision-makers. Some cities create a service corps, host public awareness events, sponsor government days and use new media to develop a variety of educational approaches that can strengthen young people's civic connection and expose them to the issues that local government faces.

Opportunities for consultation, representation and shared leadership will bring youth even closer to the places where planning and policy-making occur. The most common of these opportunities are youth councils or commissions, placement of youth on city boards and youth summits or other youth-friendly public meetings. However, a host of additional strategies, many of which are described in the Tools and Resources section, will provide youth with a real voice and opportunities for action.

City leaders can miss out on valuable input if they limit their expectations of the range of issues in which youth might be interested. In addition to working with the mayor and city council, youth can engage in numerous city processes, including master planning, neighborhood and land use planning and decisions about roadways and bike paths.

### *Work with staff and partners to shift the role of youth from service recipient to resource.*

Youth may already be connected with local government as recipients of city services. With some thought and careful planning, their role as consumers can be enhanced in a way that improves the services they receive and benefits the city as a whole.

Cities can easily create involvement activities in areas where youth already participate. These settings provide a ready-made pool of participants for activities with a broader purpose. Youth who participate in city cleanups can begin to organize “green” activities or campaigns that educate other youth about the environment. Participants in afterschool programs can take on leadership roles in guiding the programs and advocacy roles that educate funders and decision-makers about children’s educational needs.

Local officials can create consultation activities by giving recipients of a city service an advisory role. Many community centers support youth advisory groups that make recommendations about the centers’ programming and also advise city leaders about the recreational needs of the youth population.

Representation opportunities are available when boards and commissions open up slots for youth members. Advisory boards for libraries, recreation, parks, the arts, tourism, economic development and health and human services can all benefit from youth membership. Youth who are patrons of these services can represent a unique perspective. They are more likely to successfully contribute to the boards’ work if at least two youth are appointed and they receive a thorough orientation and support for participating.

A system for offering shared leadership opportunities may be more difficult to build out of an existing group of youth receiving a city service, unless there is a youth council or commission. Current councils or commissions that are primarily engaged in involvement and consultation activities can take their influence to another level with the addition of some funding authority or by connecting their focus to the development and/or implementation of an official city plan.

### *Use the idea of the youth engagement pyramid to address a pressing city issue.*

Many cities choose to focus their youth civic engagement efforts around targeted issues identified and championed by elected officials or through city plans. In this type of concentrated approach, youth become partners in an overall city effort to address a specific social or civic issue.

The four pathways of AYCE can be a helpful model for creating a system of opportunities that will attract a variety of youth and provide the greatest likelihood of impact on the issue. The chart on page 26 highlights an example of how to address one specific issue using a variety of methods of youth engagement.

### *Create “feeder systems” to support the city’s AYCE initiative.*

Young people grow up in neighborhoods and spend much of their time in school. In addition, most attend youth programs or religious services. Thus, these locations where youth are already engaged are ideal settings to promote AYCE. If the same elements of authentic engagement — a welcoming climate, a strong adult ally, a workable structure and accessible and meaningful activities — exist in these settings, youth will gravitate to those opportunities that are convenient and relevant to their day-to-day lives.

| AYCE PATHWAY      | APPLICATION TO AN IDENTIFIED ISSUE<br>EXAMPLE: DROPOUT PREVENTION                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| INVOLVEMENT       | A Mayor's Service Corps organizes mentoring and tutoring projects directed toward younger youth who are educationally at risk.                                                                                                                   |
| CONSULTATION      | Student Advisory Committees in the middle and high schools advise principals on creating a supportive school climate. The local Youth Council sponsors a youth speakout in targeted neighborhoods on barriers to youth success in the community. |
| REPRESENTATION    | Youth representatives are appointed to serve as members on the city's commission to raise student achievement. They bring recommendations from the Student Advisory Committees and Youth Council to be considered by the group.                  |
| SHARED LEADERSHIP | A Youth Funding Board maintains responsibility for a special fund created through the city budget and private partnerships that is designated for teen entrepreneurship and other programs that rekindle students' interest in school.           |

The challenge for the AYCE initiative is to connect these settings to a broader city agenda, and to increase youth participation in increasingly complex opportunities. If neighborhood youth have decided to clean up a vacant lot or students have organized to reduce fighting at football games, local elected officials or city staff can support these efforts — and then expand that support to expose youth to other challenges the city is facing. Over time, these groups outside of city government can become a conduit to municipal engagement opportunities.

Some cities connect their civic opportunities with specific school-based programs and curricula. Civics, government and social studies classes can use real city issues for academic content as well as service learning projects. City government benefits from the fresh and often creative input into policies or planning.

Often, school and community-based volunteer opportunities can serve as a training ground for youth to learn how to successfully communicate in groups, complete projects and express ideas. These skills can “level the playing field” so that youth from even the most challenged settings can be comfortable with city government activities and even compete for opportunities that only offer a limited membership.

The key is to ensure that some type of connection is made among the various opportunities that make it easier for youth to be engaged. These connections can range from a website of updated opportunities to ongoing meetings of service providers ensuring that everyone is working together and personally encouraging young people to participate.

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"AYCE is not just about listening to youth at the input level, it's about them having some opportunities at the decision-making end as well."*

— Adult ally, Massachusetts

*"Seeing and witnessing the policy process from research to development through implementation was eye-opening and inspiring."*

— Youth, California

*"Youth are frustrated with traditional approaches — they need more dialogue and action. We need to pay attention to how we name and frame the work. It is important to employ topics that interest and excite youth, to frame issues in a way that are concrete and that relate to their world."*

— Adult ally, New Hampshire

*"We have the potential to shape youth policy by gaining empowerment and work experience through opportunities created by us."*

— Youth, Massachusetts

*"It is essential to match the skills and interests of the young people to the opportunity they will pursue. It's so important not to set kids up for failure."*

— Adult ally, Virginia

### *Add a youth component to established or strategic city processes.*

One way to bring youth voice into the city's decision-making process is to construct a parallel process in which separate adult and youth groups tackle a selected issue. Both groups are given the same task — to gather data from their peers and to use that data to create recommendations that address the problem. They can work at their own pace and in their own style to meet a pre-determined deadline. The two groups then come together, at least once, in an interactive event to present their own ideas and prepare joint recommendations.

The success of a parallel process hinges on the facilitator. The adult(s) selected to work with the youth must be able to translate technical and detailed information into concepts that are both appealing and understandable to young people. The other key task is to prepare both sides to work together and facilitate their joint meetings so that the work of each is valued and incorporated into the final recommendations.

It is essential to the process that everyone is clear about expectations. Youth need to know how their input will be used and who will make the final decision. At the end of the process, an evaluation of the youth and adult participants' perceptions will yield useful findings for planning the next steps.

## On the Map

### **Olathe, Kan.: A Continuum of Civic Engagement Opportunities for Youth of All Ages**

The City of Olathe (pop. 119,993) and the Olathe School District have developed a unique AYCE initiative that connects young people with the legislative, executive and judicial branches of local government from elementary grades through high school. Olathe's Youth in Government cur-

riculum begins with a third-grade level “Learning About Olathe” workbook on the structure of local government, and continues with tours of City Hall where youth participate in mock City Council meetings. By middle school, youth can participate in a year-round Youth Congress, modeled on the U.S. Congress, that culminates in an annual General Assembly to set local policy priorities. High school students take part in influential consultation opportunities through a Teen Council, which provides input on city policies and sponsors youth leadership programs. These older youth can also apply for city internships that connect them with careers in local government and teach them about criminal justice, health and human services, finance, public administration, information technology and environmental planning. Finally, youth have access to shared leadership opportunities through a student-run Youth Court that focuses on “positive, pro-social sanctions” of first-time juvenile offenders as an alternative to prosecution in District Court, as well as an Olathe Youth Fund in which youth disburse funding to student-led projects.<sup>2</sup>

## 10 WAYS YOUTH AROUND THE COUNTRY ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

10. Using GIS technology to plot the location of safe places and supportive organizations in the community.
9. Meeting with elected officials about the impacts of budget cuts on youth from low-income neighborhoods.
8. Planning a conference to promote “going green” throughout the city.
7. Reviewing proposals from youth groups requesting funds for their annual service projects.
6. Lobbying the state legislature to lower the voting age in local elections to include high school seniors.
5. Creating Web-based strategies for cities to reach out to youth and young adults.
4. Recommending policies to reasonably address concerns about youth congregating in public spaces.
3. Designing models for a new city skate park.
2. Attending a school board meeting to monitor the impact of student input on board decisions.
1. Hosting a candidates’ forum for the upcoming local city council elections.

### Nashville, Tenn.: Relying on the Strength of Local Intermediaries

Thanks to the City of Nashville and the Oasis Center, a local nonprofit that offers a range of youth development services, young people in Nashville are able to participate in a broad spectrum of opportunities for civic engagement. The Mayor’s Youth Council serves in a political capacity by gathering input from peers throughout the city and county and conveying that perspective to city government. Through Oasis Community IMPACT, young people develop leadership skills to promote education and economic equity in their community by conducting research, publishing reports and mobilizing their peers. Targeting youth in high-violence areas, Youth United provides a venue for anti-violence education, adult mentorship and youth-led community organizing. Within this system, youth with varying interests, backgrounds, skills and abilities can all find a way to contribute.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller description of the Olathe, Kan., AYCE initiative, see NLC’s 2009 report on The State of City Leadership for Children, Youth, and Families, which is available at [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef).

## A RIVER CITY STORY: MAYOR SMITH CHAMPIONS AYCE

### ONE YEAR LATER...

One year into the project and the Pride team is in full swing. As he reads the first annual report, Mayor Smith thinks back on the ups and downs of the previous year. Certainly, the youth involvement was a highlight. But how can it be sustained? Already, some of the young people have dropped off the teams. There was also that string of meetings where a group of adults, used to making decisions in smaller, more private settings, threatened to derail the process.

Fortunately for Mayor Smith, he had assembled a small group of supporters to think through the initiative and brainstorm how to tackle problems. As he reads the report, Mayor Smith smiles at how many of the suggestions came from the group's two youth representatives, and he remembers proudly the candor that developed in the group after they all agreed to the value of everyone's input.

There will definitely be a commitment for year two.

*continued on page 35*

# | THE SUPPORT:

## Build Youth-Adult Partnerships to Support Engagement

*Are there adults, within and outside of local government, who are willing and able to work as colleagues with youth and build bridges between them and the adult world?*

Just about everyone knows the three fundamental criteria for success in the field of real estate are location, location, location. In the field of youth civic engagement, the mantra is: relationships, relationships, relationships.

The relationships between young people and adults, and among youth and their peers, are the single most influential contributor to the success of any youth engagement initiative. Youth may be attracted to the work of local government because of their passion for an issue, but they will remain engaged because of their relationships with adults and other youth they encounter.

Adults who work alongside youth in any type of social or community change activity are often referred to as allies. They build the bridge between young people and the adult world. In the hands of skilled and caring adults, youthful enthusiasm and ideas can be channeled into meaningful action.

The key to the youth-adult relationship is understanding partnership. In many such relationships, the adult either dictates the agenda and controls what occurs, or leaves the young people alone and abdicates responsibility for what occurs. In a partnership, the adult ally and young people work “shoulder to shoulder” sharing ideas and expertise, translating information about one another’s worlds, creating a mutual agenda and taking joint responsibility for outcomes.

Adult allies can play an essential role in supporting youth participation by:

- recruiting a diverse group of youth and helping them all feel welcomed;
- preparing them to participate through training and education;
- setting high expectations for what youth can accomplish;
- opening doors and increasing their access to decision-makers;
- assisting them in taking advantage of the ongoing opportunities within the structure that has been established; and
- supporting their efforts to create other youth-driven initiatives.

### **What Can Municipal Leaders Do to Create the Support?**

*Identify caring, skilled adults who share your passion about youth engagement and empower them to undertake this work.*

There are adults in every city (within or outside of local government) who are willing and able to work in partnership with youth. Adult allies can be found within city hall or in schools, universities, nonprofits or intermediary organizations.

In some situations, the mayor or other municipal leaders serve as allies in the city's youth engagement initiatives, although this requires strong listening skills and an openness to youth input when teen concerns challenge current city policy.

Adult allies can inspire and support young people and encourage them to explore their passions. Many city leaders and adult allies recognize that youth are an underserved and under-represented population and that AYCE efforts amplify the voices of those who may not be heard.

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"People say not to use jargon with kids. The issue is not avoiding it, it's educating youth so they are empowered to converse in any setting."*

— Adult ally, Rhode Island

*"Trained adult allies are essential — they are the ones who help youth navigate through a foreign system and prepare them for the work they are about to do."*

— University professor, New Hampshire

*"Good ideas are only part of the solution. Effectively relating to people, and understanding the 'politics' of the situation are also key."*

— Youth, Oregon

*"Cities that really 'get' this have a network of adults who find a common language and vision about youth and believe deeply in the democratic process."*

— Adult ally, Virginia

*"Councilmembers can be a liaison to a youth council and serve in that educational role. Youth serving on a board or commission can be matched with a mentor or 'buddy' to help them learn the ropes."*

— Elected official, Colorado

### *Ensure that adults continue to learn the dynamics of youth-adult partnerships and group work.*

The adults selected as allies must be able to set realistic, high expectations for what youth can accomplish, focus on intergenerational relationships and build safe and nurturing settings. They must be able to empower without abdicating, support without taking over and encourage without preaching. Most importantly, they must be able to remain as focused on the desired outcomes of the AYCE initiative as on the needs of the youth participants.

Even adults who are experienced in working with youth may need some additional training in order to work effectively with teens in a partnership (see the Frequently Asked Questions section for information on youth-adult partnership training resources). The role of adult ally is different than the familiar teacher, counselor or recreation professional relationship.

### *Provide youth with ongoing training in civic participation and ensure they are prepared to navigate adult settings.*

Young people's knowledge and skills must match the available opportunities and tasks they will be undertaking. When youth do not receive the proper training, their meetings, presentations and project outcomes may lack the focus needed to succeed. When properly trained, youth can far exceed even the highest expectations.

Part of the adult ally's role is to ensure that youth receive the right training. From basic presentation skills to understanding the city's capital improvement plan, the adult ally's knowledge and resources are essential if youth are to be seen as legitimate participants in municipal decision-making.

### *Model the kind of youth-adult relationship you seek for the community.*

It is important that city leaders meet directly with youth in order to understand their concerns and interests, and to closely monitor the direction of the city's youth engagement efforts. It also sends a powerful message to others in the community. Many adults are influenced by youth stereotypes and their fear of teenagers can make them reluctant to bring youth into a decision-making process. Municipal leaders can be helpful in confronting these stereotypes as the public sees youth and adults working together.

## VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

*"You know you have the right adult when the kids' eyes light up when they come in the room."*

— University professor, Minnesota

*"The issue of 'prepared and supported' is very important — this is an experiential process, not just learning about it."*

— Adult ally, California

*"We also need to remember that the best advocates may be parents, teachers, etc., so we need to have an element of grassroots support."*

— Elected official, California

*"When I get confused, I go back to the mission, which is bridging the gap between young people and government."*

— Adult ally, California

*"I learned that I may not always agree with the choices of others, but I can understand that our differences stem from our experiences."*

— Youth, Washington

*"The role of the adult can be to show youth that local government is a forum for making a difference."*

— Elected official, Colorado

*"Young people do not typically get the larger view without processing with an adult."*

— Adult ally, Minnesota

### *Reach out to parents to encourage their support of youth participation.*

Parents can be powerful allies who encourage youth to become involved in their community. Yet parents' negative attitudes about government or concern about how youth engagement will impact their children's schoolwork or other responsibilities may inhibit the ability of youth to serve as resources to the city.

Meeting with parents early in the process to cultivate a relationship will eliminate many of these concerns. Partnerships with schools and community-based organizations can help local govern-

ment reach out and communicate with parents from various cultural groups or linguistic backgrounds. In many cases, the young person serves as the interpreter for the family, so it is important to carefully plan how the meeting is structured.

## On the Map

### San Francisco: Building Relationships Pays Off

After nearly a decade and a half of investing in youth civic engagement, San Francisco is proving that young people really are the leaders of tomorrow. By engaging local youth not only in middle and high school, but through their college years as well, the San Francisco Youth Commission (SFYC) and the community-based Youth Leadership Institute encourage and support youth leaders as they develop into adult allies. With a strong focus on developing leaders through training and mentoring, some alumni have graduated to elected and appointed positions within the city. For instance, Julia Sabory, the inaugural youth chair of the SFYC, now leads the commission as its full-time adult director.

## 10 IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR A TEAM OF ADULT ALLIES

10. A fundamental belief that authentic youth engagement is the right approach.
9. Ability to connect with a wide range of youth.
8. A sense of the potential and possibilities of youth.
7. Knowledge of how to support youth to develop their ideas.
6. Wise and creative use of resources.
5. Willingness to challenge youth in a caring way.
4. Flexibility and a willingness and ability to change how they do business.
3. Patience and persistence — in it for the long haul.
2. Ability to separate a young person's personal issues and the outcomes of the effort.
1. Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!

### Spokane, Wash.: The Importance of Adults Who “Get It”

Joanne Benham, director of the city/county youth department in Spokane, has a strong background in youth development. As a local government employee, she brings a community-based, youth advocacy perspective to her role and relies on partnerships to accomplish her goals. By staying on top of the latest youth development research and best practices from across the country, the youth department is able to facilitate a youth engagement approach that not only works for the city, but meets the needs of local youth. Staff see their roles as listener, supporter, connector, translator and mentor, and they work hard to create trust among the youth and adults of the community. According to Benham, the department serves as a bridge — between youth and adults, and between local government and the community.

### Cambridge, Mass.: Adult Allies are Crucial to Youth Success

Youth-adult partnerships are key to youth civic engagement in Cambridge. By creating a youth subcommittee of the mayor-led Cambridge Kids' Council, adult allies provide youth with the extensive training and support network needed to navigate often unfamiliar professional environments and political processes. Reflecting on a recent achievement of the youth subcommittee, Mary Wong, executive director of the Kids' Council, explains, “It was an eye-opener for the city to see how the youth can be empowered if you give them the appropriate supports needed. It was also an eye-opener to the youth to be able to see what they can do.”

## A RIVER CITY STORY: MAYOR SMITH CHAMPIONS AYCE

### THE STORY CONTINUES...

Mayor Smith swings his car into the parking area at the entrance to the interstate where he has agreed to meet his riders. It will be a two-hour drive to the state capital where members of the local Pride team will present to developers on the benefits of investing in River City. He relishes the time he will be able to re-connect with Alyce, now a high school senior, who has been with the Pride team since the first meeting. He has not met his other passenger, Robert, but the city youth coordinator says he is a passionate presenter and ready to take on the challenge.

The young people will be an excellent complement to the economic development advisors and city officials sharing the presentation. For just a moment, he envisions the look of astonishment on the faces of the developers when the team walks into the room, and then how it gradually dawns on them that River City is a great investment because of its genuine focus on youth.

It has been more than two years since Mayor Smith first launched his idea of engaging youth in the city's economic development plans. In spite of the bumpy ride, he sees a number of promising strategies underway such as the youth-to-business mentoring project and the new initiatives incubator, both supported by youth.

But most importantly, he realizes that a shift has happened in his city. It is subtle but real. Youth are being seen and treated like citizens. People talk about them differently. They are not just football players or delinquents.

As mayor, he knows the city's economic challenges are not entirely solved, but a new voice has been added to the decision-making process. When another problem surfaces, or a new idea is introduced, he knows he can count on his fledgling youth civic engagement initiative to help the city tackle it.





# Nine Signs Your City Is Committed to Authentic Youth Civic Engagement



By **NLC Staff** in **Cities - General, Civic Engagement, equity, General, Love My City, Racial Equity, Youth** on **June 14, 2019**

As a city leader, how do you know if the policies and programs your city provides for youth are effective? One great and often overlooked way is to engage the experts—youth—before, during and after decisions about the policies and programs that will affect them so they, too, can love their city.

In supporting youth, it is critical to center the voices of young people, especially traditionally underrepresented youth or youth missing from the conversation, such as youth of color, LGBTQA youth, undocumented youth, homeless youth, youth involved with the justice system, and others.

Our youth civic engagement [perceptions inventory](#) can help you determine how ready your community is to authentically engage young people in decision-making.

## The Setting

Cities interested in building authentic youth civic engagement need a setting in which the civic climate of the community is welcoming and inviting to youth, acknowledging their role in public policy, planning, and decision-making.

To measure your community's readiness, consider these two ratings from the inventory.

1. Public officials and community leaders view youth as a valuable resource for improving the community for everyone.
2. A local champion for youth civic engagement has enough authority to rally support among city departments and in the community.

In one example of valuing the voices of youth, Denver provided hundreds of youth diverse ways to contribute to the [Denver Youth Health Assessment](#). The city employed a small core group of youth to collect, analyze and apply to the assessment information they collected from hundreds of their peers through surveys and listening sessions.

## The Structure

Cities also need structures in which the organization and system that supports authentic youth civic engagement meet both the needs of the local government and the interests of the young people.

Two ratings from our inventory offer an example of organization and system structures that will help determine if your city is prepared to support authentic youth civic engagement.

3. Youth have access to transportation and other resources needed to support their active involvement.
4. Capacity exists to provide adequate training to prepare youth to participate in meaningful roles and assist them in navigating adult-focused municipal settings.

Another example of system structure is the effort by four cities in Maryland to [lower the local voting age](#) to 16. Between 2013 and 2019 the following four cities lowered the voting age:

Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, and Riverdale Park. In Greenbelt, youth leaders educated the public and won the first public referendum on the issue and a city council vote.

## **The Strategy**

Cities need a strategy that offers youth and city leaders an opportunity to examine the wide array of challenges facing their municipality and provides them with a framework to affect systems change.

Two ratings from our inventory will help you determine if the strategy is appropriate for your city.

5. City leaders see youth voice as more than just a single program and have taken active steps to embed it into municipal, school, neighborhood and community systems.
6. The city provides an array of meaningful opportunities for all youth to join pro-social activities.

The [My Brother's Keeper Alliance](#) relaunched the [My Brother's Keeper Network](#), a national call to action to build safe and supportive communities for boys and young men of color where they feel valued and have clear paths to opportunity. Youth, along with city and community leaders, philanthropists and other engaged citizens, informed the cradle to career framework. This strategy also engages youth in the vision, agenda, local action plan, and communications plan development, implementation, and evaluation processes.

## **The Support**

Furthermore, cities building authentic youth civic engagement need support from adult allies in the public and private sectors that enable young people to gain the knowledge, training, and skills necessary to be civically engaged and career ready. Engaging adults with diverse experiences similar to those of youth, especially more marginalized youth, increase opportunities for youth to authentically engage in the community decision-making process.

To measure your community's readiness, consider these three ratings from the inventory.

7. Designated individuals within city government are responsible for carrying out youth and community engagement.
8. Staff focused on youth have broad networks and experience enabling them to recruit and establish positive relationships with diverse youth.
9. A network of caring, skilled adults exists to help youth have a role within local government and community decision-making.

In 2014, the city of Boston launched [Youth Lead the Change](#) — an annual \$1 million participatory budget process led by youth between 12–25 years old. This initiative moves beyond directing programs at youth, it shifts power to the youth and enables them to navigate the governmental process.

NLC supports cities engaging youth in decisions through a [collection of resources](#) and its [youth delegate](#) program at City Summit and the Congressional City Conference.

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# Top Ten Reasons to Lower the Voting Age

<https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/top-ten-reasons-to-lower-the-voting-age/>

Accessed July 11, 2019

Lowering the voting age is a new concept for many people, but there are many good reasons that show doing so is a sound and ethical choice.

**1. Young people have adult responsibilities, but are denied the same rights.** People under 18 are contributing and active members of society. Millions of us are **employed** and **volunteer in our communities**. Many people under 18 also have “adult” responsibilities – such as being the **primary caregiver** for an ailing family member, running a **business**, and making **substantial financial contributions** to our households.

We are also capable of incredible intelligence and accomplishment. People under age 18 have the ability to **win a Nobel Prize**, **reach the summit of Mount Everest**, **conduct cancer research**, become **published authors**, **teach a graduate-level course** in nuclear physics, **run their own schools**, **work for NASA**, and **risk their lives** to save others. If young people are capable of such a variety of amazing feats, certainly we have the capacity to vote for the candidate that best represents our interests.

**2. Young people are expected to follow the law, but have no say in making it.** People under 18 are expected to follow adult laws and experience adult consequences if we don’t do so. In every state, it is possible for a case to be **transferred out of juvenile court into adult criminal court**, and in certain states all crimes committed by 16- and 17-year-olds are automatically transferred. Approximately 250,000 people under age 18 are tried, sentenced, or **incarcerated as adults** every year across the United States. This means that not only does our society expect young people to know “right from wrong” and the consequences for breaking certain laws, but our society also expects that we are able to navigate the adult legal system and are mature enough to be placed in adult prisons. It is hypocritical to tell us that we are mature, responsible adults when they commit a crime, but ignorant and naive when we want to vote.

We are also expected to follow the law regarding taxes. In 2011, people under 18 paid over **\$730 million in income tax** alone and had no representation on how that money was spent. This “taxation without representation” should be no more tolerable to modern Americans as it was during the American Revolution.

**3. Young people are already participating in politics.** Despite attempts to exclude us from the political process, we are still making our voices heard. Young people have started ultimately successful campaigns for **mayor** and **state legislature** before they were even old enough to vote.

People under 18 have also participated in politics by forming **Political Action Committees, managing campaigns**, advocating for our rights in front of legislative bodies, and becoming grassroots activists. And even though we are not allowed to vote, young people are able to contribute just as much money to a political campaign as adults are. In fact, the **U.S. Supreme Court ruled that banning people under 18 from this part of the political process** actually violates our First Amendment rights.

Whether it is forming political groups at school, organizing protests, or using social media to express our opinion, young people find a way to become involved in politics. And if we want to be involved in the political process this badly, how can politicians deny us the right any longer?

**4. Young people make good voters.** When the voting age has been lowered to 16, young people have shown our interest in voting. In 2013, when Takoma Park, Maryland, lowered its voting age to 16, registered voters under 18 had a **turnout rate four times higher than voters over 18**. And again in Hyattsville, Maryland (the second place in the U.S. to lower the voting age to 16), registered 16- and 17-year-old voters had a **higher turnout rate than older voters**. Seventeen-year-olds also had a **higher turnout rate than people aged 20-50** in the Chicago Primary in 2014.

Similar trends have occurred outside the United States. Voters aged 16 to 17 had a higher turnout rate than older voters under age 30 in **Norway's 2011 elections**, voters under 35 in **Scotland's 2014 referendum election**, and voters aged 18-20 in **Austria's elections** in 2011 and 2014.

Although it can be difficult to determine what constitutes a “good vote” (see below), a group of researchers tried to determine the quality of votes cast by people under 18 by comparing how well their votes aligned with their stated values. Voters aged 16-17 were found to have made **choices that were “more congruent with party positions”** leaving the researchers to conclude that “lowering the voting age does not appear to have a negative impact on input legitimacy and the quality of democratic decisions.”



**5. Lowering the voting age will help increase voter turnout.** Voting is a habitual act – people who vote in one election are more likely to vote in the next. Lowering the voting age will **establish new voters** when people are less likely to be moving as a result of attending college or leaving their families. People under 18 tend to have stronger roots in their community, often having lived in the same area for many years and established connections to their school, family and friends, and other community groups. This gives us an awareness and appreciation of local issues. As we are less likely to live away from home, we don't have to deal with unclear residency laws or absentee ballots that can discourage college students or other new voters. Because of the habitual nature of voting, encouraging new voters at a younger age will increase voter turnout as the population gets older. Young people who vote also

influence the voter turnout of their parents. In a study of the Kids Voting program (where people under 18 were allowed to cast votes in a mock election), **parents who had children participating in the program were more likely to vote in the actual election.**

**6. Lowering the voting age will improve the lives of youth.** Young people have a right to be heard and to have our interests taken seriously. However, by disenfranchising young people society tells us that we do not have anything of value to add to the political conversations in our society. It also gives politicians permission to ignore our interests as people under 18 have no way to hold their representatives accountable.

This is especially concerning since there are certain issues, such as environmental degradation, public education policy, long-term government debt, corporal punishment laws, and **poverty** that impact young people more than anyone else. Younger people may also be better in tune with modern issues around internet privacy and social media use. But since young people are underrepresented in politics, the issues affecting us are underrepresented as well. Lowering the voting age will also help to increase the civic engagement of young people. The words spoken before the Senate Judiciary Committee supporting lowering the voting age in 1971 are as true then as they are now:

“The anachronistic voting-age limitation tends to alienate them from systematic political processes and to drive them to a search for an alternative, sometimes violent, means to express their frustrations over the gap between the nation’s deals and actions. Lowering the voting age will provide them with a direct, constructive and democratic channel for making their views felt and for giving them a responsible stake in the future of the nation.” (1971 U.S. Code Cong. Admin. News at pp. 365-367)

**7. Knowledge and experience are not criteria for voting eligibility.** Even though young people can be as politically informed as older people, there is no requirement that either group have any political knowledge at all. In fact, whenever tests have been used to register voters, it has always been about preventing certain groups of people from having political power rather than making sure the electorate is as informed as possible. Because of their discriminatory nature, knowledge or literacy tests are not used anywhere in the United States.

In spite of this, Congress has tried to determine the amount of knowledge a potential voter might need and even then concluded in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that **a sixth-grade education provided “sufficient literacy, comprehension, and intelligence to vote in any election.”** Later on, when renewing the Act in 1975, the Senate Judiciary Committee pushed this idea further by stating, “It is difficult to see why citizens who cannot read or write should be prevented from participating in decisions that directly affect their environment.” (S. Rep. No. 94-295, 1975: 24)

If you are diagnosed with a developmental delay or experience a brain injury, you do not automatically lose your right to vote and in fact, many states have passed laws that expressly ensure that **you retain the right to vote unless it has been removed in a court of law.**

**8. There are no wrong votes.** In a democracy, we don’t deny people the vote because we think they might vote badly. It can be easy to feel baffled by the way other people vote, even if we know them very well. Many people believe that there are voters who are completely ignorant of

the issues, woefully misguided about the economy, who get their political ideas from biased media, vote for candidates based on their personality, and are completely naive about the world. And yet, disenfranchising people simply because we disagree with them is not considered a serious position, unless that group happens to be disenfranchised already.

No advocate for lowering the voting age believes that young people will always vote intelligently, especially since not everyone can agree on what that means. But the same can be said for adults. Why are young people held up to a higher standard than everyone else?



**9. Arguments against lowering the voting age can be used to disenfranchise adults, too.** In a democracy, universal suffrage is the right of all citizens and the ability to vote should not be taken away lightly or arbitrarily. If a group is to be disenfranchised, the burden of proof must lie with those who want to remove voting rights, rather than requiring the oppressed group to prove why they deserve the right.

Throughout history, arguments against increasing the franchise have always been dubious and they still are – no matter the group. If you think young people are too naive or uneducated to vote, then ask yourself how would you feel about receiving a test before you could vote. No matter the test, many adults would fail. There are also adults that lack maturity or can be easily manipulated. The argument that certain groups of people lack the knowledge or maturity to vote has been used **against increasing voting rights to people who don't own land, servants, and women** throughout history.

**10. Legislation to lower the voting age has more support than you think.** When the United States decided to end age discrimination in voting for everyone 18 and over in all elections, it adopted the 26th Constitutional Amendment. The Amendment's overwhelming and bipartisan support allowed it to make history as the quickest Constitutional Amendment ever to be ratified.

Today, lowering the voting age continues to have wide support. Nearly half of US states have seen legislative attempts to lower the voting age in the last two decades, including four towns in Maryland that have successfully lowered their voting age to 16. Internationally, more than 25 countries have a voting age lower than 18 and many more are looking at following their lead. You can check out our **Voting Age Status Report** to learn more about the wide-ranging support to lower the voting age.



# What If the Teen City Council Is Better Than the Grownup One?

KRISTON CAPPS, JUL 5, 2018

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**These high schoolers take their local government very seriously.**

Brenda Platt gobbled up a lot of the time allocated for the June meeting of the Takoma Park Youth Council. A concerned citizen, Platt is the co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, an organization that lobbies local governments to adopt composting, among other environmental pushes. Platt detailed at length her failed efforts to launch a composting pilot through Montgomery County Public Schools, which seven of the council's eight members attend. For at least half an hour, she outlined her tactical agenda and led the assembly through the Kafkaesque panoply of excuses that Maryland schools had given for shooting down her project.

This was local government at its finest: a council held hostage by one constituent's exhaustive accounting of all the Byzantine frustrations keeping her vision from becoming reality. It was local leadership at its zenith, too, when Emma Morganstein, 17, vice chairperson for the Takoma Park Youth Council, cut through the crap. "This is an amazing discussion," she said, "but unfortunately, we have to wrap up."

Officially, newsletters and composting were the main items on the agenda of this gathering of middle- and high-school students appointed to lead and represent their peers in Takoma Park, a Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C., well known for its progressive bent. A divisive downtown development was another bullet point, one that has also occupied the adult city council. But the first point of order taken up for the meeting, held in the town's community center, involved pronouns.

"I'm trans," said Council member Elliot Davey, whose name on the council roster is Althea. "I'm non-binary specifically. Some of you guys know that, some of you don't. One thing that none of you know, I'm in the process of changing my name. I'm changing my name to Elliot, and I wanted to share that so we could put [my name] on the agenda."

That was that. Following a couple of polite clarifying questions, the Takoma Park Youth Council moved on to pressing matters: an exciting prospect of talking with peers in Morocco, the bog of local composting. A fifth-grader from Piney Branch Elementary spoke about asking local

restaurants like Roscoe's and Mark's Kitchen to give up plastic drinking straws. The council had work to do.

Part after-school club, part political action committee, the Takoma Park Youth Council is an experiment in democracy. Five years ago, the city became the first in the nation to lower its voting age, giving 16- and 17-year-olds the opportunity to vote in city elections. All but one of the members of the Takoma Park Youth Council present at the June meeting were able to exercise their franchise last November. For these civics-oriented teens, local government matters just as much, if not more, than national elections.

And the Youth Council gives these councilors an opportunity to shape the vote on decisions that affect them.

“What’s been very important to the Youth Council right now is establishing relationships and making our presence known,” says Kiran Kochar McCabe, 16, chair of the Youth Council. “It’s the first year we’ve been in existence, which is why we’re not as focused on policies, and that sort of change, right now, this year. We’re focused a lot more on reaching out to youth and really understanding what they’re interested in.”

The Ward 6 representative will be a senior at Montgomery Blair High School next year. To describe her as a go-getter would be a rash understatement: She got her first *Huffington Post* byline in the eighth grade. As the Youth Council’s inaugural leader, she is building a foundation first, establishing protocols and cementing communication strategies. The Youth Council issued its first newsletter in June, with topics ranging from a post-mortem on a D.C. metro area student climate summit to the status of repairs on area play structures damaged during a recent storm.

Four of the council’s members (McCabe, Morganstein, Davey, and Ward 2’s Adelaide Harris) will be seniors next year; others range from 13 to 16 in age. Among teen legislatures across the country, the Takoma Park Youth Council might be the most powerful, since its members can do more than just advise on issues—they can vote on them.

“In terms of really doing engagement, and reaching out to other young people in the community, they’ve put together a survey to talk to other young people to find out what are the issues they want to be working on,” says Takoma Park Mayor Kate Stewart.

It's really cool to see how many businesses are giving up their single-use plastic straws in favor of more environmentally friendly options! #takomadoesntsuck  
— Takoma Park Youth Council (@YouthTakoma) June 28, 2018

The Takoma Park Youth Council comprises young representatives from most of the city’s six wards. The council emerged from a project called Difference Makers, a student-led nonprofit formed by Takoma Park Middle School students in 2009. The group’s sponsor, science teacher Bryan Goehring, drafted a charter in spring 2017 with the help of students (and the mayor). The City Council ratified the charter last fall and opened applications for representatives, who serve by appointment.

“We looked through other youth councils across the nation and what their charters looked like,” says Davey, 16, a representative from Ward 1 who first heard about the proposal at a City Council meeting—where they are a regular.

(Note: CityLab received permission from parents to speak with the teens quoted here before attending the Takoma Park Youth Council’s June meeting.)

As McCabe is quick to note, the Youth Council has zeroed in on outreach since its launch. Christiane Yimgnia, a member of the Takoma Park Police Explorer Post, joined the council as a liaison between the two youth organizations. (She heard about the council in AP French class.) The Youth Council conducted a survey of area students that indicated that policing and public transportation are two strong areas of interest. Respondents also wanted a youth town hall, so the council scheduled one for October 14.

Adults have discussed recalling officials over the prospect of adding a two-story mixed-use building. The Youth Council, on the other hand, has flatly stated its support.

“Most of the people involved in activism are rich white people, when in reality that’s not who Takoma Park is,” Morganstein said. She might be right. The city is slightly less than half white, according to census figures; one-third of the population is foreign born. The median home value is just north of a half a million dollars, which might explain why 49 percent of the city’s population rents. Activists aside, a plurality of Takoma Park residents are wealthy and white.

“I really hope with this youth town hall, more of the youth who aren’t traditionally involved will feel more welcomed, and won’t view us—people in government—as a closed-off club,” Morganstein says.

Even as the council is sussing out its constituents’ priorities, it’s also reaching beyond Takoma Park’s borders. Morganstein and George Ashford, 15, a member from Ward 2, attended a recent conference of the National League of Cities. There they spoke with members of the Austin Youth Council, which is trying to lower the voting age for residents of the Lone Star capital.

That idea is catching on in the D.C. area. In 2015, Hyattsville, a suburb next door to Takoma Park, became the second municipality in the U.S. to lower its voting age to 16; Greenbelt, another Maryland suburb, followed suit earlier this year. Berkeley, California, allows voters as young as 16 to participate in school board elections.

Not to be outdone, D.C. Council member Charles Allen introduced a bill in April to lower the voting age in the District to 16—for both local and federal elections. That latter distinction would be unprecedented (although California considered a ballot measure lowering the age a notch for general elections). The bill appears to have the support of a majority of the D.C. Council. Eventually, teen advocates would like to expand voting rights nationwide.

The Takoma Park Youth Council is model local government turned pro. In fact, the group might just improve matters locally. For example, the council found its own angle on Takoma Junction, a hotly debated proposal to do something with a downtown parking lot owned by the city. It’s an argument that’s been going on for two decades. While the city is known for its left-leaning

politics (local wags often call the suburb “The People’s Republic of Takoma Park”), its residents can go unimaginably not-in-my-backyard over the prospect of change. Adults in the community have even discussed recalling various officials over the prospect of adding a two-story mixed-use building. The Youth Council, on the other hand, stated flatly its support for moving forward with Takoma Junction, offering this additional insight:

With increased foot traffic to the junction, there will most likely be more young children walking along Carroll Avenue, a busy road. The location of the public space proposed by [Neighborhood Development Company] is right next to the street, and if children stop to play or run around, it appears to us to present a serious safety risk. Having more automobile traffic and large trucks parking in the nearby layby may cause additional danger. Another concern of ours is making sure that the public bus stop is not adversely affected by the changes at the junction. Many teenagers rely on public transportation and the bus system to be more independent in getting around the county. Having a usable stop at the junction will be important to people of our age.

Even in places where teenagers don’t yet have any right to vote—and that’s most places—a youth council could still help draw attention to issues that adults might overlook or ignore. Young people living in the suburbs of D.C. tend to focus their ire on the federal government, McCabe says, but she wants to draw their attention closer to home. “Especially city government,” McCabe said. “It’s the level of government that makes policies that most directly affect you.”

The Takoma Park Youth Council is still figuring out what those hard policy issues will be. Davey says that it would be great for the council to do some work to expand trans rights. “I am hoping that next year, when we begin to really focus in on policy, we can advocate the school board to include more information on gender identity in middle- and high-school health curricula,” Davey said.

With school out, the Takoma Park Youth Council is taking a recess. McCabe has a personal priority in mind for her second term.

“I want for the next newsletter to establish some responsibilities for everyone, because I ended up doing a lot,” she said. “Which is fine, because I enjoy it, but I have a life, sometimes.”

## About the Author

# Kriston Capps

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Kriston Capps is a staff writer for CityLab covering housing, architecture, and politics. He previously worked as a senior editor for *Architect* magazine.



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Youth - Plan, Learn, Act, Now!  
*Y-PLAN prepares young people for  
college and careers, and builds equitable, healthy,  
and sustainable communities for all!*

## What is Y-PLAN?

### Overview

Y-PLAN (Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) is the UC Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools' (CC+S) educational strategy that uses the community as a context for core learning and engages young people in authentic city planning and policy-making. Over a decade of action-research demonstrates that the Y-PLAN 5-Step methodology produces a “double bottom line” of positive outcomes for students and communities:

- **Students:** Y-PLAN builds the capacity of young people to effectively contribute youth-driven data and insight to the planning and policy making process; develops college, career, and community readiness skills.
- **Communities:** Y-PLAN builds the capacity of civic leaders to value and use youth insight to create better plans, policies, and more healthy, sustainable, and joyful places for everyone.



### Y-PLAN National Initiative

Since 2000, Y-PLAN has developed into a national model of civic-led work-based learning that has involved over 5,500 students, educators and civic partners in finding solutions to community challenges. In September 2012, CC+S received generous grants from the Capital One Foundation's Schools Transforming Communities initiative and local foundations to bring Y-PLAN to civic and educational leaders in targeted urban centers and to build a national community of practice around Y-PLAN. There are two goals for this exciting expansion:

- Create a publically available, Y-PLAN Digital Toolkit – this website is designed to build on existing know-how and resources, and build the capacity of educational and civic leaders to collaborate and implement rigorous real-world action projects that support academic outcomes and community development goals.
- Launch a multi-site action research initiative – working closely with teachers, community leaders and students, CC+S aims to build capacity and track outcomes for local Y-PLAN initiatives in nine cities across the country to understand the affect of Y-PLAN on students, adult allies, and communities. CC+S also takes a lead of convening Y-PLAN participants to actively share best practices and learn from one another.

### What Makes Y-PLAN Different?

There are two core features of a Y-PLAN project that distinguish Y-PLAN from other forms of civic education, or project based learning more broadly, and lead to the “double bottom line” of outcomes:

1. **An Authentic Civic Client:** Students are commissioned by a civic leader or community partner to work on a real/ ongoing community development problem. The civic client demonstrates a real need for student insight, voice, and leadership, and has the power to implement youth ideas.
2. **Methodology:** Students engage in a 5-step methodology of critical inquiry, modeled on the professional participatory planning process and scientific method. As students move through the five-step “Y-PLAN Roadmap,” students learn civics by doing civics. They engage in real community research and generate evidence-based solutions for change. While growing from initial work with College and Career Academies, Y-PLAN fits into a broad range of academic courses, career-technical courses, interdisciplinary programs of study, and school organizational structures.

**Visit [y-plan.berkeley.edu](http://y-plan.berkeley.edu) to learn more about the Y-PLAN Double Bottom Line and Action Research Initiative**

# Y-PLAN “Double Bottom Line”

## Summary of Emerging Outcomes for Students & Communities

Y-PLAN is a classroom-based educational strategy that uses the community as a text for core learning to authentically engage young people in city planning and policy making. Grounded in over a decade of research, Y-PLAN’s 5-step solution-oriented methodology demonstrates a “double bottom line” of positive outcomes for students and communities, summarized below.



## Community Outcomes: *Building Healthy, Sustainable and Joyful Communities*

Y-PLAN is a reciprocal strategy that builds the capacity of young people to effectively contribute youth-driven data and insight, and of civic leaders to value and use youth insight to create better plans, policies, and more healthy, sustainable, and joyful places for everyone.

| <b>Participants:</b> Y-PLAN changes the way professionals and civic leaders think                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Process:</b> Y-PLAN changes the process of city planning and policy making                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Place + Policy:</b> Y-PLAN changes the way places are planned, designed, and built                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change in attitudes and perceptions of young people as legitimate community contributors</li> <li>Challenges assumptions, and disrupts negative stereotypes of marginalized young people</li> <li>Develop an appreciation and ability to use youth insight as important “local knowledge” to inform decisions</li> <li>Re-inspired about the potential and value of diverse, “fresh,” community-wide engagement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New strategy for sustained, informed, solution-oriented community engagement</li> <li>Youth-driven participation diversifies the community engagement process, bringing low-income parents and other community members of color to the planning and policy-making table</li> <li>Catalyst for cross-sector collaboration. Mutually beneficial partnerships are developed as cities and schools recognize their “shared clients” - schools are recognized as key institutions for city planning and development</li> <li>Trust is built between traditionally disenfranchised or marginalized communities and civic institutions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth-driven data and insight highlights critical community issues and moves the needle on policy discussion</li> <li>Plans and design of the built environment incorporate youth insight, considering diverse users of space</li> <li>Planning <i>with</i> and designing space <i>for</i> young people inculcates sense of ownership, and stewardship, and use of space, resulting in savings on maintenance costs</li> <li>“Simple yet powerful” insight results in “good to great” improvements in the built environment that can be implemented on a small budget and brief time span</li> </ul> |



## Student Outcomes: College, Career, and Community Readiness\*

The Y-PLAN strategy builds the capacity of young people to effectively contribute youth-driven data and insight to the planning and policy-making process, focuses on core learning and the development of youth voice, leadership and career and college readiness skills. Key student outcomes:

### Collaborators

- Work with peers to recognize individual and group strengths, delegate roles, set clear goals and deadlines to produce a high quality project for a real client, on a real deadline
- Participate in collaborative discussions with diverse partners and issues - responding thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarizing points of agreement and disagreement, and justifying views with evidence and reasoning
- Use technology, including the internet, to collaborate with others

### Community Contributors

- Increase civic efficacy, and "student voice," to influence their own learning and communities
- Work with peers promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making
- Transfer and apply the Y-PLAN method of community development to additional contexts and issues to affect positive community and school change
- Work-based learning provides relevant skills and opportunities in preparation for internship and employment

### Critical Thinkers and Problem Solvers

- Conduct community research to identify and analyze a critical community issue, and support recommendations with logical reasoning, textual evidence from primary and secondary sources such as plans, historical documents, and youth-driven data such as mapping, interviews, and surveys.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion, and evaluate author/speaker's point of view and use of evidence
- Link critical reflection to action, and move from micro to macro analysis of critical community issues of equity and opportunity as they develop proposals for change

### Creators, Designers and Innovators

- Construct explanations and design evidence-based solutions to a real community problem
- Create maps and illustrations to spatially represent observations and findings
- Use digital media (text, graphics, audio, visual, interactive) in presentations to add interest and help the audience understand findings, reasoning, and evidence

### Communicators

- Build reciprocal communication skills, learning to listen and incorporate diverse opinions while building capacity and confidence to advocate their own ideas and opinions
- Develop public speaking and presentation skills, presenting information, findings, and evidence clearly and logically so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning
- Accurately apply a range of academic and domain-specific vocabulary in verbal presentations, and through informative, argumentative, and explanatory writing

\*Y-PLAN is designed to support the attainment of Common Core and other aligned frameworks including 21st Century Skills.



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# Y-PLAN Oakland

## Client: City of Oakland

Public Space



### How can the City of Oakland promote equity in the engagement processes and policies put forth in the 2030 Energy & Climate Action Plan (ECAP)?

The **City of Oakland's Sustainability Program** is updating the City's ECAP for the year 2030. They partnered with the Center for Cities + Schools to leverage Y-PLAN bring the voices of Oakland young residents in this process to help ensure equitable community engagement.

CC+S partnered **Skyline High School's Green Energy Pathway** with the City to address the following questions:

- *How can the City of Oakland equitably engage local youth in the ECAP process?*
- *What recommendations can youth propose that would uniquely advance equitable climate action through specific strategies such as low-carbon mobility, adaptation, and climate education for all residents?*
- *How can equity be infused into the ECAP process and ensure that communities understand the need for and development steps of the updated ECAP?*

This Y-PLAN project focused students on researching pressing urban issues such as **climate change** impacts, **food inaccessibility**, **transportation**, and **waste or water management** challenges impacting Oakland today. As students developed proposal ideas, they were asked to consider to each strategy would be **equitably accessible** to all Oakland residents.



OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Community Schools, Thriving Students



Youth Leadership - 52 of 84



Skyline Pathway  
**GREEN  
ENERGY**



## How can schools and their communities in the Bay Area continue to thrive through 2050?

The Center for Cities + Schools (CC+S) is excited to partner with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC/ABAG) to generate youth insights, recommendations, and proposals to inform the Horizon initiative.

Building on last year's Y-PLAN Resilient by Design Youth Challenge, Y-PLAN Bay Area Horizon partnership will utilize the award-winning Y-PLAN methodology to examine the future of schools in the Bay Area in the year 2050. Across the nine Bay Area counties, students in elementary, middle, and high schools are researching how our region's transportation, land use, economic development, and resilience decisions will impact schools and propose strategies that allow schools and their communities to thrive in an uncertain future.

This analysis will support the Horizon initiative, a current regional planning effort led by MTC and ABAG. Through this project, students are exploring the pressing issues and challenges Bay Area residents may face through 2050, while developing strategies for making better transportation and infrastructure investments regardless of what the future holds.

### High Schools

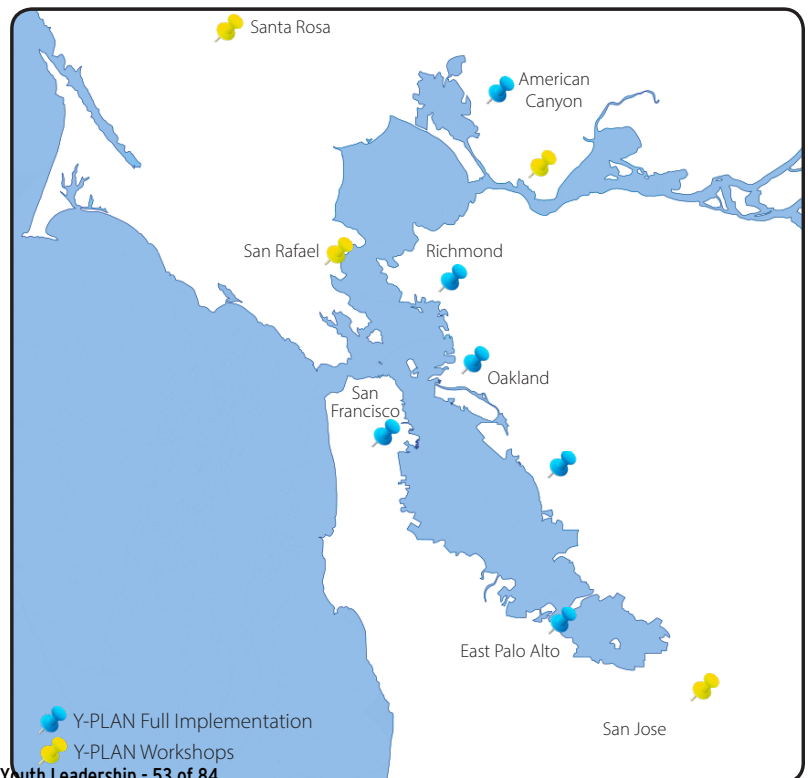
*American Canyon High School*  
*Balboa High School*  
*East Bay Arts High School*  
*East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy*  
*Kennedy High School*  
*McClymonds High School*

### Middle Schools

*Benicia Middle School*  
*Escuela Popular*

### Elementary Schools

*Cesar Chavez Language Academy*  
*Laurel Dell Elementary*







19-20

2020-2021

# San Francisco Youth Commission Budget and Policy Priorities



A poster for the San Francisco Youth Commission 2018-2019. The background is yellow. It features 14 portraits of commissioners, each inside a lightbulb-shaped frame. The portraits are arranged in four rows: the first row has 5 portraits, the second row has 5 portraits (the first is a white lightbulb icon for a vacant seat), the third row has 4 portraits, and the fourth row has 3 portraits. Below each portrait is the name and title of the commissioner. At the bottom, the text 'SAN FRANCISCO YOUTH COMMISSION' is written in large white and black letters. Below this is the SF Youth Commission logo, social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram with the handle @SFYOUTHCOM, and the website and email address. A white box on the right contains the years '2018 - 2019'.

Commissioner Obermeyer

Commissioner Marshall-Fricker

Commissioner Dong

Commissioner Cureton

Commissioner Quick

Vacant Seat

Commissioner Sadarangani

Commissioner Ty

Commissioner Ibarra

Commissioner Green

Commissioner Vigil

Commissioner Chin

Commissioner Hylton

Commissioner Nassiri

Commissioner Hoogerhyde

Commissioner Min

Commissioner Hirji

# SAN FRANCISCO

## YOUTH COMMISSION



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[sfgov.org/youthcommission](https://sfgov.org/youthcommission) | [youthcom@sfgov.org](mailto:youthcom@sfgov.org)

2018 - 2019

### San Francisco Youth Commission Staff:



Austin Truong  
Community Partnerships Specialist



Kiely Hosmon  
Director



Naomi Fierro  
Youth Development Specialist

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- Pg. 9** Priority 2: Improve Voter Turnout and Civic Engagement By Pre-Registering 16- and 17- Year Olds In the San Francisco Unified School District

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## Who We Are

The San Francisco Youth Commission was created by the voters under a 1995 amendment to the City Charter. Composed of 17 youth appointed each year from across San Francisco, the Commission advises the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor on policies and law related to youth. The Commission also provides comment and recommendation on proposed legislation that affects youth before it can be voted on by the Board and approved or vetoed by the Mayor.



## The Budget and Policy Priorities (BPPs)

According to SF Charter Sec 4.12 “The purpose of the Commission is to collect all information relevant to advising the Board of Supervisors and Mayor on the effects of legislative policies, needs, assessments, priorities, programs, and budgets concerning the children and youth of San Francisco.” The Youth Commission’s Budget and Policy Priorities, known for short as its BPPs, are a set of recommendations that the Commission prepares and releases each year in a report to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors on the budgetary and policy needs of the youth in San Francisco. This report provides a basis upon which the Mayor and Board of Supervisors can make informed decisions about how to allocate the City’s \$11 billion annual budget in a manner that equitably serves San Francisco’s youth population. The Youth Commission’s BPPs can also be used to highlight policy changes that would benefit youth.

## How You Can Join the Youth Commission

Youth Commissioners are appointed annually, and can seek reappointment at the end of their term. Each of the eleven members of the Board of Supervisors appoints one commissioner to represent their district; the Mayor also appoints one commissioner to represent youth city-wide. The Mayor also appoints five more commissioners from underserved communities to ensure the diversity of the Commission. Regular terms begin in September of each year. The Youth Commission usually releases an application in March, and accepts submissions through early May, though this timeline can change from year to year, and vacancies occasionally occur at other times of the year. The Commission believes in representing the full diversity of youth across San Francisco, and welcomes any passionate and involved youth to apply. Interested youth should sign up for the Commission’s newsletter at <https://sfgov.org/youthcommission/connect-with-us>, to receive updates when the Commission begins accepting applications.

Dear Community,

The City of San Francisco is constantly evolving. From the recent legislation introduced to shut down the Youth Guidance Center to new wealth coming in from the recent abundance of technological IPOs, the City has changed from the one we even knew when we started our term as commissioners.

Similarly, the San Francisco Youth Commission has been growing and trying new things this year. We focused on revamping and improving the Youth Commission's presence in the community, as well as in City Hall. Commissioners were able to improve the budgeting process by passing the first ever Omnibus Preliminary Budget and Policy Priorities Resolution in January 2019, allowing us to make meaningful budget recommendations to the Police Commission, the Juvenile Probation Commission, and hold a youth specific budget hearing at the Board of Supervisors Budget and Finance Committee in February 2019.

In addition to our chartered Youth Commission work, we have gone above and beyond in community outreach and advocacy. Youth Commissioners sponsored and participated in a multitude of community events, ranging from a District 4 Youth Forum, DCYF's Youth Advocacy Day, Mayor Town Hall gatherings, voter pre-registration trainings, a youth-SFPD roundtable, and a kick off Vote16 event. In addition, we revamped our outreach efforts by improving social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. Our Youth Commission Profiles series highlighted the accomplishments and personality of Youth Commissioners, as well as sharing information about our community partners and their events. We also organized the first ever Youth Commission Open House for prospective Youth Commissioners, where we saw over 50 young people express interest in the work the Youth Commission does.

The Youth Commission's table of contents for this year's Budget and Policy Priorities Report is much shorter, but more specific, compared to past years. The Youth Commission has focused on integral issues to narrow our focus to improve our overall impact and efficiency. The Youth Commission is focused, and will continue to focus, on six long term priorities covering our primary issue areas. Youth specific housing issues and needs have been promised by the city, but not implemented, and Youth Commissioners continue to put pressure for tangible outcomes that are not just merely symbolic. The Youth Commission is committed to the Vote16 campaign for a second time, and are extremely motivated to get 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in local elections on the November 2020 ballot. Likewise, the Youth Commission is excited to be a part of the movement to shut down the Youth Guidance Center in San Francisco by December 2021. All of these campaigns need youth at the forefront, and we welcome and encourage youth to not only be involved, but to lead the way as these issues move forward.

As Chairs, we are immensely proud of how much growth has happened this year and we are all excited to see what the future holds for our Youth Commissioners and the youth of San Francisco. With that, we are thrilled to share with you the Youth Commission Budget and Policy Priorities for FY 2019-20 and 2020-21.



Bahlam Vigil, Chair



Josephine Cureton, Vice Chair

Youth Commission  
City Hall ~ Room 345  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102-4532



(415) 554-6446  
(415) 554-6140 FAX  
[www.sfgov.org/youth\\_commission](http://www.sfgov.org/youth_commission)

## Budget Executive Summary

On Wednesday, February 13, 2019, Youth Commissioners presented their mid-annual **budget** priorities to the Board of Supervisors' Budget and Finance committee. This was a follow up to the Youth Commission's in [YC File No. 1819-AL-03](#) Omnibus Preliminary Budget Priorities Resolution (OPBP Resolution) that was unanimously passed on January 7, 2019.

- The YC is focused on obtaining funding for:
  1. **Re-entry programs and services** for youth exiting the justice system;
  2. **Substantial immediate funding to meet SF's 2015 goal of 400 units** of permanent supportive housing for TAY exiting homelessness; and
  3. Funding for TAY-specific housing/ programs/services **proportional** to the size of that population in the homeless population (20%), and oversight on the construction of a TAY Navigation Center.
- **Most importantly, YC opposes cuts to any program directed towards underserved youth and TAY populations.**

\*items **bolded** and asterisked indicate priorities considered important and urgent by the Commission's relevant committees.

### Civic Engagement Committee

- |    |                                                                                       |                                    |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) | Create Fee Waivers through DCYF for the \$30 fee to obtain a California ID at the DMV | YC will continue to work with DCYF |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|

### Transformative Justice Committee

- |     |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2)  | Mandatory trainings for law enforcement officers in youth cognitive development and interactions with youth (SFPD) | <- Needs oversight and implementation.                                                         |
| 3)  | Young Adult Court                                                                                                  | YC supports continuation of the program (funded by an outside grant administered through DCYF) |
| *4) | <b>Enhanced re-entry programs and services</b>                                                                     | <b>Needs inter-department coordination and development of resources/services/programs</b>      |
| 5)  | Rehabilitation and healing for youth who have experienced police brutality                                         | Needs departments to develop long-term solutions                                               |

### Housing and Land Use Committee

- |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *6) | <b>HSH needs to meet SF's 2015 goal of 400 units of permanent supportive housing for TAY exiting homelessness (188 completed, 25 under construction, 67 more to come online in the future)</b> | <- <b>Needs substantial funding in the immediate future, as four years past the 2015 deadline the City is less than halfway to 400 units online</b> |
| *7) | <b>Funding for TAY-specific housing/ programs/services proportional to the size of that population in the homeless population (20%)</b>                                                        | <- <b>TAY experiencing homelessness are a severely underserved segment of the population</b>                                                        |
| 8)  | Mental health/substance use treatment and counseling programs in supportive housing for TAY                                                                                                    | YC urges HSH to coordinate with service providers and DPH to enhance and expand existing options                                                    |
| 9)  | Equip TAY experiencing homelessness with first-aid, and increased support services for food and laundry                                                                                        | YC urges HSH to coordinate with service providers to enhance and expand existing options                                                            |
| 10) | Employment training and life-training for TAY exiting homelessness                                                                                                                             | Needs HSH to develop programs                                                                                                                       |
| 11) | More accessible drop-in centers with staff trained in youth development and to receive youth from marginalized communities                                                                     | Needs HSH to coordinate with service providers                                                                                                      |

## Tacoma teens won't wait for adults to solve the city's problems

by [Liz Brazile](#) / February 11, 2019

Photos by [Matt M. McKnight](#)



*Stella Keating, 14, seen at home in Tacoma, Washington, Feb. 8, 2019. (Photo by Matt M. McKnight/Crosscut)*

Stella Keating, 14, doesn't believe in waiting around for the adults in her community to solve its most pressing issues. The way she sees it, young people are the future of civic leadership and also deserve a seat at the political table.

"It's important for me because it's not just adults living in the city — it's also youth," said Keating, who regularly attends city council meetings and played a key role in organizing Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards' Youth Engagement Task Force. "The people who are able to vote in our city don't just represent themselves — they represent everyone."

The politically engaged eighth grader was one of nearly 60 Tacoma-area teens on the Youth Engagement Task Force who recently learned new techniques for productively discussing hot-button issues. During the all-day training on Jan. 26, the youth participated in a series of storytelling and listening activities designed to foster introspection, empathy, and cooperation. The workshop was inspired by conflicts surrounding politics on every level, ranging from national disputes over the continued commemoration of pro-slavery historical figures in the South to Tacoma's own debate concerning a liquid natural gas (LNG) project.

Now, organizers of the Revive Civility and Respect Cities workshop hope the Tacoma participants will help lead the larger community in taking a solutions-oriented approach to political discourse going forward. The training came about thanks to a partnership between the city of Tacoma and the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD), a nonpartisan grassroots organization at the University of Arizona.

Woodards learned about the Revive Civility program at a 2018 Mayors Innovation Project meeting in Washington, D.C. NICD presented a model for tackling divisive issues, using the conflict over the removal of Confederate monuments in Richmond, Virginia, as a case study.

Woodards got to thinking about how polarizing matters like the creation of an LNG plant on Native American ancestral land were impacting her community back home in Tacoma. Supporters of the LNG project, for which construction began in 2016, argue that the plant's touted "cleaner fuel alternative" to sulfur-emitting fuels will be an asset to the city. Opponents say the plant could increase the risks of water contamination and air pollution.

“Our community had lost a bit of its civility in that conversation,” Woodards said about the LNG debate. She first considered organizing a training for adults using the Revive Civility and Respect Cities approach. But she ultimately shifted the focus to youth, who will be voting and spearheading politics before long.

In regard to the initial training, Woodards said, “There was not a shortage of stories about how they feel civility plays a role in how they handle conversations. Some of our kids knew how to handle the situations better than some adults, including yours truly.”

Keating said she hopes to see this kind of training implemented on a bigger scale by schools throughout Tacoma.

“I think everyone there really enjoyed it,” she said. “I know that for my group, we had a super open conversation about a lot of issues that we see — not only in Tacoma, but in our entire nation as a whole.”

Tacoma is one of five cities to participate in a “deep-dive” pilot of the Revive Civility and Respect Cities program, which NICD launched in the wake of the contentious 2016 presidential race. Thirty-four other cities have passed civility proclamations under the initiative.



Interest in NICD, which was founded in 2011 in response to the attempted assassination of then-Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona, dramatically increased during the 2016 primary. Concerned citizens wanted to know how they could help alleviate the heightened political tension.

“People have a sense that things are worse and that’s supported by evidence,” said NICD Executive Director Keith Allred. “Voting in Congress is the most strict along partisan lines as it has ever been in 230 years.”

There are inspirational books and quotes along Stella Keating's bed at her home in Tacoma.

(Photo by Matt M. McKnight/Crosscut)

But the tensions, Allred said, have been building for decades: An approximately 40-year upward trend in congressional partisanship is at play.

Although polarization has existed for as long as politics have underpinned societies, the modern-day divide began to widen on the heels of civil rights reforms in the late 1960s, according to NICD. Then, in the early 1970s, disputes between Democrats and Republicans over issues such as gay rights and abortion compounded congressional division — or elite party polarization, as political scientists refer to it — and by extension, among constituents.

For this reason, NICD has created four main platforms, including Revive Civility and Respect Cities, that aim to foster greater respect and dignity in political conversations — not just between private citizens, but also in the media and among politicians themselves. The nonprofit also works with a network of political experts to research issues and approaches related to civil discourse.

A survey published in January by the Pew Research Center and conducted Jan. 9-14 amid the longest government shutdown in history found that about 71 percent of participants anticipated that Republicans and Democrats in Congress would be even less cooperative in 2019 than in years past. Approximately 21 percent predicted that the two parties would work together more than usual.

Allred asserts that while NICD's findings validate the growing sense of division in American politics, they also indicate that mass polarization, or polarization on a societal scale, isn't as extreme as we think it is. Rather, people largely hold more moderate political perspectives but tend to swing slightly to the left or to the right on certain issues based on their values.

There is also evidence that Americans generally find negative campaigning to be detrimental to U.S. politics and may become disillusioned with the electoral process as a result of seeing ill-mannered advertisements.

Given that candidates are mostly campaigning around caucuses and party primaries, however, moderates are often dismissed by their parties in favor of more ideologically "pure" candidates.

"Parties aren't looking for broadly supported solutions, so we think the American people will be our saving grace," Allred said. "If people have a chance to come together across those divides in a way that is structured, they genuinely find that there are good people on the other side. There can be respect and even friendship there."

In her 2018 book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*, Lilliana Mason, a University of Maryland politics and government professor, insists that partisanship has become something of a "mega-identity" for American citizens. In other words, one's vote has become seemingly indivisible from other attributes, such as race, religion and geographic origin.

Mason also emphasizes that although partisanship could be viewed as an indication of consistency in one's political attitude and therefore beneficial to democracy, this inflexibility suggests many voters no longer arrive at political positions through independent thought. Such groupthink, she argues, has contributed to the deterioration of civility in American politics.

But some experts have contended that the concept of "civility" in today's political climate isn't so cut-and-dried.

In a 2017 analysis of the use of the terms "civility" and "incivility" in political discourse, researchers from the universities of Pennsylvania and Arizona reckon that while "civility connotes a discourse that does not silence or derogate alternative views but instead evinces respect," ultimately "condemnations of the 'incivility' of those holding [minority views] can function as a silencing mechanism or means of harassing a feared or subordinated group."

Ellen Middaugh, professor of child and adolescent development at San José State University and a researcher of youth participation in civics, tends to agree. While Middaugh believes structured civil discourse education could greatly benefit younger generations, how it's designed matters. And it's important for people to realize, she said, that the notion of civility is contextual.

"The powerful and the elite set the norms for what is civil," Middaugh said. "The peril with this is you end up silencing youth who have really strong and real social justice claims."

Moreover, what constitutes bigotry or falsehood, for instance, and how it is addressed are not necessarily agreed upon.

"Some people see [accusations of racism or lying] as an ad hominem attack and some people see it as stating the truth," Middaugh said. "So we need to figure how to talk about naming racism or lying in ways that don't suppress the ability of young people to talk about their experiences."

Allred said he understands these concerns but maintains that NICD isn't out to eliminate disagreements altogether.

“Engaging someone with civility doesn’t mean that you agree with them or can’t criticize them on the merit of the argument,” he said. “We’re not just going to sing ‘Kumbaya’ and pretend there are no differences. The point is to be able to do that in a way that is done with respect and listening — to not make assumptions that people have dark motives too quickly.”

Part of the organization’s goal, Allred said, is to provide people with balanced and objective information to help them come to more complete understandings of issues — especially in a digital age when the news cycle moves at breakneck speed, giving people little time to marinate on issues before a new one dominates the conversation. And now that virtually anyone can publish content online, misinformation is rampant.

Young people especially can be susceptible to several pitfalls of online participatory politics, in Middaugh’s estimation.

“There’s some power in youth getting their voices out there, but they need to be prepared for the potential downside,” Middaugh said. “When youth speak up politically, the risk online is that it’s easy to take what they say and use it in way beyond that is their control.”

It’s important, she added, for young people to be aware of their digital footprints and to understand that the things they post can be reappropriated. There is also the possibility of being exploited by extremists who target impressionable adolescents with propaganda. Moreover, Middaugh cites evidence that participating in digital communities increases one’s likelihood of encountering hate speech and stereotypes, which can be damaging to a teenager’s developing sense of self.

But despite her various caveats regarding youth participation in online civics, Middaugh’s research suggests that such engagement helps them, in part, to cultivate a sense of identity and purpose.

“There’s a lot of access and exposure to different ideas and opportunities to speak up without having to wait for a newspaper editorial board to decide your words are worth publishing,” she said.

For her part, Keating plans to keep exercising her voice to illuminate and find solutions to issues like homelessness, housing affordability, and creating more inclusive spaces for LGBTQ individuals.

“I definitely do want to work in the city as either a council member or the mayor,” she said about her vision for the future. “I know that my goal is to start at the bottom and work my way up to my higher goal, which is to become the first transgender president of the United States.”

More immediately, the Youth Engagement Task Force and Woodards are searching for ways to apply what they learned during the Revive Civility and Respect Cities in Tacoma at-large.

## About the Authors & Contributors

### Liz Brazile

Liz Brazile is an Emerging Journalist Fellow at Crosscut focused on public education in Seattle and Washington State.

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# GovEx

## In Gilbert, Data and Technology Is All Fun and Games

August 12, 2018, By: [Emily Shaw](#)

If you're a kid, what's the only thing better than competing against your friends to win a fun video game? Competing to MAKE the best fun video game!

Gilbert, Arizona has been capitalizing on students' interest in coding — and in beating their friends — in order to connect them with municipal data and town's top priorities. For the past five years, the Town of Gilbert has hosted coding competitions through their [SPARK App League](#) program in cooperation with Arizona State University, corporate partners like Google and Waymo, and non-profit partners like the Smithsonian Institution. The competitions give high school and junior high school students a chance to strut their stuff by building games and apps with municipal service themes and Gilbert's public data. [You can watch their video on YouTube.](#)



This past year's competitions focused on clean water and "innovation and food." The winning games ranged from "[Deliver for Me](#)," a food-delivery challenge on the streets of Gilbert, to a game celebrating superhero Gilbert sanitation workers in "[Gilbert Clean Up](#)." During each competition, hundreds of students spent two days working on their creations with Scratch, a free programming language developed at MIT. With the guidance of coaches and teachers, students of all

experience levels have been able to hone their coding skills while tackling community priorities.

The competition is clearly a winner among Arizona students. However, SPARK App League is also helping Gilbert itself support two important goals.

First, as the town has grown larger and younger over the last several decades — with 71% of residents now being [under the age of 45](#) — it has intentionally focused on connecting with its "digital natives." Younger people expect to be able to interact with government online, and Gilbert strives to provide that experience in an excellent and cost-effective way. They have built up an impressive [Office of Digital Government](#) which manages a wide variety of internet-based town initiatives, ranging from the SPARK App League to the town's podcast "Government Gone Digital" to the annual Digital State of the Town documentary.

In line with this town priority, the activities of SPARK App League directly target some of the town's youngest "digital natives," giving them a tangible way to connect with Gilbert and its services. Gilbert's Mayor Jenn Daniels sees the direct relationship between supporting youth skills and the town's future. "We are very aware and focused that this is the future of our community – and the future of the world. Every kid needs to learn how to program, understand what that means, and how it translates to whatever career choice they have."

At the same time, a second motivation that drove the development of SPARK App League was the town's interest in finding a way to more effectively use town resources. Town Manager Patrick Banger pointed out that while they didn't want to spend a lot of extra money, they still needed to know, "How can we harness the value of the data we collect that sits on our servers and on our shelves, and put that to use for residents – for the betterment of our residents?" The SPARK App League program they designed offered a clear win-win. Engagement was significant, with high schools all around the state getting involved. The town has seen new Gilbert apps built at no cost, and has also helped build students' skills for future career opportunities.

It seems that every year Gilbert continues to find new ways to connect through its digital services. Its most recent innovation, launched just this year, is an [open data portal](#) that comes with its own [helpful animated guide, Alex](#). In partnership with What Works Cities, Gilbert developed an open data policy, conducted an inventory of its data and began an open data program. Characteristic of their focus on connection with the community, however, they focused on ensuring that their open data portal provides an easy online on-ramp to the community at large. Along with offering data, they have emphasized digital literacy, including [a step-by-step guide](#) to getting started with open data and ["Connecting the Dots"](#) features that use the town's data to tell a story. Comment boxes allow residents to ask questions about the data and then let "Alex" respond.

The Town of Gilbert truly proves that municipal data and technology projects can be a lot of fun. We'll be keeping an eye on them and can't wait to see what they dream up next!

# COLUMBIA YOUTH COMMISSION

**TO:** Mayor Benjamin  
**FROM:** Lauren Harper  
**CC:** Columbia City Council, Ariel Cathcart, Heyward Harvin  
**DATE:** Sept. 7, 2018  
**RE:** Columbia Youth Commission

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This memo outlines the framework and expectations for the Columbia Youth Commission.

## **Why is it important to more deeply engage with the youth in our community?**

Over the past few years, the activism and civic engagement in Generation Z (people born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) has been evident, particularly in movements such as The March for our Lives. To better leverage the energy, ideas and voices of young people in our community, programs like a Youth Commission are not only beneficial but are imperative for cities that want to more intentionally engage with youth and understand their needs as a demographic.

Aspects of this proposal are modeled after the Philadelphia Youth Commission program.

## **SPECIFICS FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:**

The City of Columbia Youth Commission is a program for local students to provide leadership and improve services for youth in the City of Columbia. The group of young leaders will work to bridge the gap between adults and youth, fostering a greater sense of unity, communication and partnership throughout the city. The City extends a warm welcome to students between the ages of 14 to 18 to become actively involved in their community.

**Purpose:** To encourage youth involvement in the community, enhance leadership skills and voice policy ideas and concerns of our City's youth.

**Mission:** To provide civic participation and involvement in the community while promoting positive activities and opportunities for youth in Columbia.

## **Components of the Columbia Youth Commission:**

**Policy** - It is vital for our youth to be involved in their government. To create a new avenue for their active leadership, the City of Columbia Youth Commission will meet with the Mayor, City Council and key city staff to discuss how various issues affect the youth in our community.

Networking - Members of the Columbia Youth Commission are provided an opportunity to dialogue directly with members of City Council, key senior staff within the City of Columbia and community leaders that work directly in areas that are critical to the community's quality of life.

Education - The Commissioners receive an education on how local government operates and responds to the needs of a community.

Roles and responsibilities of the Youth Commission will include:

- Commenting on legislation and policies that impact youth
- Creating public service programs that improve the lives of youth
- Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of youth programs and policies
  - Coming up with program evaluation measures that consider aspects of a program that matter most to youth.
- Partnering with other youth organizations on shared issues
- Preparing peers for leadership roles, postsecondary education and career.

### **SELECTION PROCESS OF THE YOUTH COMMISSIONERS:**

The City of Columbia and Richland County will hold a city and county-wide election, similar to how typical municipal and county elections are held. One youth commissioner will be elected from each city district, with three at-large representatives from the County. There will be a total of seven (7) people on the Youth Commission.

Eligible candidates are students ages 14-18, born between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2004.

This election will be unique in that all 14-18-year-olds in the county will be eligible voters. Youth commissioners will campaign to voters just as an adult candidate for elected office does.

### **Term + term limits:**

Each youth commissioner will serve a one (1)-year term. Commissioners may serve up to two (2) terms as long as they are younger than or exactly 18 at the time of the election and/or still enrolled in high school.

### **SUGGESTED CURRICULUM + TIMELINE FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:**

The Youth Commissioners will meet at least monthly.

Members of the public will be notified of all Youth Commission meetings at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Meetings will be open to the public with allotted time at the end of each meeting for public comment.

### **Month One –**

- Youth Commissioners will get to know one another and will plan a meet-and-greet with City/County staff and elected officials.
- Youth Commissioners will identify at least three (3) policy areas they would like to address throughout their term. For example: extracurricular programming for 14-18 year-old residents.
- Youth Commissioners will discuss the design of the current logo and make suggestions for a new one.

### **Month Two –**

- Youth Commissioners will strategize programming and/or events that involve the previously-outlined policy areas.

- Youth Commissioners will discuss holding listening sessions or town halls (virtual and/or in-person) to better understand the needs and desires of their peers city and county-wide.
- Youth Commissioners will develop subcommittees and make subcommittee assignments.
- Youth Commissioners will create a timeline for the remainder of their term.

## APPLICATION:

The application for the Columbia Youth Commission is below. The full application and submission permission can be found at: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf5\\_DhSlAMkYO-zTJWbQPp2Jg\\_F\\_K0WaN1tIV1hAMwBMoVsdg/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf5_DhSlAMkYO-zTJWbQPp2Jg_F_K0WaN1tIV1hAMwBMoVsdg/viewform)

### Columbia Youth Commission application

Please complete this form if you are interested in becoming a candidate for the Columbia Youth Commission. For more information about the Columbia Youth Commission, please visit <https://columbiasc.gov/mayor/get-involved/youth-commission>.

\* Required

First Name \*

Last Name \*

Middle Initial

Preferred Name

Home Mailing Address \*

Your mailing address MUST include street, unit number (if applicable), city, state and zip code.

Your Cell Phone Number \*

If you do not have a cell phone, please put N/A.

Your Parent or Legal Guardian's Cell Phone Number \*

Your school-issued email address \*

Please note that all correspondence will go to this email address, so you will need to check it regularly.

Emergency Contact Name \*

Emergency Contact Phone Number \*

Have you applied or served on the Columbia Youth Commission before? \*

Yes

No

Name of Your High School \*

Address of Your High School \*

Cumulative GPA \*

Expected Graduation Year \*

Please attach your resume \*

If you are having trouble attaching your resume here, please email it to Lauren at [lauren.harper@columbiasc.gov](mailto:lauren.harper@columbiasc.gov).

If you need help writing your resume, please check out this link <https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/resume-writing>. Be sure to include work experience, volunteer experience, extracurricular activities (like sport teams and clubs), career interests and any honors or rewards you've earned.

Digital Signature \*

I certify that the information provided above is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that giving a false answer to any question, or withholding or omitting any information requested, may be grounds for the denial of this application and/or dismissal from the Youth Commission program.

## **Columbia Youth Commission Election Process**

The Columbia Youth Commission is a program that will give teenagers (ages 14-18) in Columbia and Richland County the opportunity to serve as a liaison between local government and the region's youth. Over the past few years, the activism and civic engagement in Generation Z (people born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) has been evident, particularly in movements such as The March for our Lives. To better leverage the energy, ideas and voices of young people in our community, programs like a Youth Commission are not only beneficial but are imperative for cities that want to more intentionally engage with youth and understand their needs as a demographic.

Students at public high schools and select private high schools in Richland and Lexington counties will have the opportunity to elect nine of their peers to the Columbia Youth Commission. There will be four representing the City (for each of the four city districts), three at-large Richland County representatives and two at-large Lexington County representatives. Youth commission candidates will campaign among their peers for a seat, just as an adult candidate for elected office does.

### **The election process:**

1. Each school district (or private school) sends the Office of the Mayor a file with all of its high school students' school email addresses. The file will not be shared with any external parties.
2. The Office of the Mayor will send an email message to all students regarding the Youth Commission via their school email address, which will include information about the program, the program application and information about the election itself, which will be hosted through a form created on Cognito Forms. We believe to be effective and garner the most students registering for the program, the email will need to be repeated at least three times to ensure all students see it and have an opportunity to respond.
3. The students who apply to be candidates for the youth commission election will be selected, and ALL students will be notified by the Office of the Mayor via email who the candidates are.
4. The Office of the Mayor will contact the students via email about how they can vote and on what day(s).
5. The winners will be contacted by the Office of the Mayor via email, and ALL students will be notified regarding who the winners are.

## Prodded by young people, cities take aggressive climate action

[Elizabeth Dunbar](#) · St. Louis Park, Minn. · Mar 21, 2017



St. Louis Park High School iMatter members Sophia Skinner, left, Jayne Stevenson, center, and Lukas Wrede, right, are interviewed inside the school on Wednesday. *Evan Frost | MPR News*

Spurred by residents not yet old enough to vote, two Minnesota cities have approved resolutions to reduce citywide greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2040.

There's hope the idea will spread nationally in the absence of broader, federal-level action on climate change.

A year ago, students in St. Louis Park first urged the City Council to pass the "climate inheritance" resolution.

Their plea went like this: "Because we are going to have to live with the effects of climate change much longer than most of you here, we believe that what we have to say matters. And we know St. Louis Park has what it takes to be a leader in that worldwide movement."

• Full coverage: [Environment](#)

It took the group a couple months of prodding city officials to vote on the resolution. The City Council passed it last May, becoming the first in Minnesota to do so.

During a presentation earlier this month, the students learned where St. Louis Park's greenhouse gas emissions come from. The resolution passed by the council calls on city leaders to include young people as they come up with the plan to tackle emissions.

"It was really nice to have adults actually listen to you as a student and empower you," said Jayne Stevenson, a senior at the high school who has been on the city's environment and sustainability commission.

She said the city is only beginning to think about the big changes required to meet the emissions reduction target.

"I think it's going to be really hard, because it's hard to change business practices, but that's where we're hoping to come in and I think we'd be willing to go and talk to business people and stuff, because people tend to listen to youth sometimes," she said.

Young people "are the moral authority" on climate change, says Larry Kraft, executive director of iMatter, the national organization that came up with the climate inheritance resolution.



Larry Kraft, center, chief mentor of iMatter, sits with St. Louis Park High School students. He became passionate about youth and climate change after leaving his job in corporate marketing and traveling with his family. *Evan Frost | MPR News*

"If they're involved on an ongoing basis, they can keep it moving," Kraft said. While Kraft served as a mentor to the students, it's largely been driven by them. "This city council was certainly one that

was receptive to the message, but it wasn't on their priority list to do a climate action plan. And it went from not on their priority list to the top of their priority list."

Kraft says students in the St. Louis Park group texted all their friends in other cities, and many more city council campaigns are in the works.

The campaigns aren't limited to high schoolers. Earlier this month, 11-year-old Olya Wright and several others asked the Grand Marais City Council to pass the resolution.

"We're not here to simply complain, but to come together to find direction," Wright told the council.



Alec Loorz sets up cameras before an interview. *Evan Frost | MPR News*

Alec Loorz was 13 and living in California when he and his mom founded iMatter, the group behind the local climate action campaigns. Now 22, Loorz said his past efforts, such as lobbying Congress, would likely be less effective right now.

"It seems like almost a waste of time to put energy into trying to change things at that level," he said. "The idea is that in the local communities, that's where people actually know the youth of their communities. They can actually see, wow, OK, these people are my neighbors."

Loorz said the campaigns aren't limited to cities where Democrats make up the majority. Last month the climate inheritance resolution passed unanimously in conservative Carmel, Indiana.

*Corrections (March 21, 2017): A previous version of this story incorrectly stated when the St. Louis Park city council adopted its climate inheritance resolution and listed the incorrect age for Olya Wright.*

# St. Louis Park Climate Action Plan

February 2018

# 2040

Setting a course toward carbon neutrality



## Letter from the Youth of St. Louis Park

Dear Neighbors,

We are St. Louis Park High School students from the Roots and Shoots Environmental Club. In March of 2016, in partnership with iMatter, we presented a Youth Climate Report Card and asked the St. Louis Park City Council to adopt a Climate Inheritance Resolution demonstrating the city's commitment to protect our future and the lives of generations to come. That Climate Inheritance Resolution passed and has led to this Climate Action Plan.

The climate crisis will have a huge impact on our future. An inadequate response now will cause dangerous economic and environmental disruptions, many of which are already being felt around the globe. But we see this as an opportunity to rethink our current actions and imagine a better, more sustainable future.

By committing to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, the city will be on a path to no longer contribute to the climate crisis. St. Louis Park has an opportunity to be a leader in the movement to restore a healthy climate and set the standard for the rest of the state and country.

We are proud of St. Louis Park and the City Council for this Climate Action Plan and for supporting environmental stewardship – there is much left to do! Accomplishing the goals of the Climate Action Plan will require the participation of citizens, businesses, and organizations throughout our community. We envision St. Louis Park as a resilient and healthy city for generations to come, and for this to happen, all of us have to be involved.

So, St. Louis Park, we challenge you to have the creativity and courage to imagine a new future with us. A future with clean, renewable energy, non-polluting forms of transportation, minimized waste, and a renewed appreciation of our reliance on nature.



Signed,

Lukas Wrede, on behalf of the SLP High School Roots and Shoots Club and iMatter

*“The time to act is now... we shouldn’t have to be afraid of our future.”*

– Jayne Stevenson, Class of 2017

*“We believe in a better future for St. Louis Park.”*

– Lukas Wrede, Class of 2018

*“The time is now to come together as a united force, to insure a livable future for us, for your children, for your grandchildren, and for the generations to come. The time is now to create a sustainable future.”*

– Sophia Skinner, Class of 2017

## Executive Summary

St. Louis Park is a leader in local clean energy initiatives, having passed the most ambitious municipal climate goals in Minnesota. With its sights set on carbon neutrality by 2040, a bold yet achievable goal, the city must continue to challenge status quo energy usage and associated greenhouse-gas emissions. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) that follows begins with three kick-start projects to help spur clean energy changes in the community and build momentum for the implementation of this plan. This is followed by seven climate goals, supporting strategies, and specific initiatives and actions to help guide St. Louis Park toward intermediary progress by 2030. The purpose of setting goals to 2030 rather than 2040 is to get the city on a trajectory toward its carbon neutral goal and allow an interim point to examine progress and reassess its course of action. The CAP then outlines more aggressive, advanced strategies that are necessary for the achievement of carbon neutrality by 2040. The CAP concludes with guidance on how the city itself can strive to improve its climate impact to lead the community toward its collective goals.

Recognizing the difficulty of transitioning into this plan, three kick-start projects are designed to catalyze engagement with the community and build momentum for change. The first project is a youth-led initiative, building on the city's history of engaging its young residents. The second project aims to centralize information about the plan and other climate action resources into one, easy-to-find hub for households and businesses to reference. The third project is to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles by installing chargers in public parking lots.

The next section states seven climate goals, with each accompanied by a series of strategies and specific initiatives and actions. The following goals address the greatest areas for climate impact:

- 1. Reduce energy consumption in large commercial buildings 30% by 2030**
- 2. Reduce energy consumption in small to mid-size commercial buildings 30% by 2030**
- 3. Design and build all new construction to be net-zero energy (NZE) by 2030**
- 4. Reduce energy consumption in residential buildings 35% by 2030**
- 5. Achieve 100% renewable electricity by 2030**
- 6. Reduce vehicle emissions by 25% by 2030**
- 7. Reduce solid waste 50% by 2030 from Business as Usual**

Specific reduction targets are assigned to each strategy that were calculated using the wedge diagram tool (Appendix F). The strategies are supported by initiatives and actions intended to help the city achieve these targets. The impact of each of the listed initiatives is aggregated to demonstrate the total emissions reductions. At the end of each section is a list of resources that are available to support the city in implementing these actions. The seven mid-term goals will jointly accomplish a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 and a 62% reduction by 2040. The remaining emissions will come from fossil fuel use in buildings and travel, including vehicle and air travel. The remaining sources of emissions will require the city to identify additional advanced strategies (e.g., fuel switching, thermal solutions, and carbon offsets) to achieve carbon neutrality.

Following the seven mid-term goals are examples of longer-term, deep decarbonization initiatives St. Louis Park must begin to plan for in the next five to ten years in order to address the remaining 38% of emissions. The city is encouraged to begin long-range planning for the following Advanced Strategies:

- A. Identify opportunities for thermal energy grids**
- B. Explore opportunities for combined heat and power**
- C. Anaerobic digesters for waste heat and compressed natural gas**
- D. Fuel switching**
- E. Carbon offsets**
- F. Emerging technologies**
- G. Scope 3 emissions**

The CAP concludes with recommendations for how city operations can be improved to help reach carbon neutrality by 2040. While these operations only account for a small portion of overall carbon outputs, city leaders serve as visible examples to demonstrate that achieving these goals is possible.



## St. Louis Park seeks to strengthen firearm regulations upon request from students

The move is the result of discussions held this year between city officials and St. Louis Park students who pleaded for stricter gun control following a spate of school shootings across the nation.

By [Miguel Otárola](#) Star Tribune

JULY 28, 2018 — 7:24PM



JEFF WHEELER — STAR TRIBUNE

“How many children’s lives and people’s lives are we going to have to accept losing before we decide that there are some minimal things that we can do?” St. Louis Park Mayor Jake Spano said.

St. Louis Park officials are developing policies to restrict the sale of firearms in the city and regulate how police get rid of outdated weapons.

The move is the result of discussions held this year between city officials and St. Louis Park students who pleaded for stricter gun control following a spate of school shootings across the nation.

“These are absolutely reasonable restrictions,” Mayor Jake Spano said. “How many children’s lives and people’s lives are we going to have to accept losing before we decide that there are some minimal things that we can do?”

The City Council asked staff to develop the policies at a recent study session and is expected to review them this year, according to City Manager Tom Harmening. They include:

- Prohibiting the rental of city facilities for gun shows.
- Disallowing licensed firearm dealers from selling inside their homes.
- Destroying police firearms no longer in use and firearms seized in criminal investigations, with some exceptions.

Licensed firearm dealers who already are allowed to sell in their homes could still do so, according to Harmening. Retiring officers who want to keep their service handgun could buy it through a dealer.

City facilities have never been used for gun shows, according to Harmening.

State law pre-empts cities, counties and towns from regulating “firearms, ammunition, or their respective components.” Home rule charter cities such as St. Louis Park can set zoning restrictions on where sales take place, according to a city report.

The discussion to regulate firearm sales was sparked by a national student walkout in March following a shooting at a Parkland, Fla., high school that killed 17 people. Spano met with a group of St. Louis Park High School students who shared their concerns about school safety.

Spano then spoke with Kory Krause, owner of Frontiersman Sports, a local gun shop. Krause vowed to raise the sales age for assault rifles from 18 to 21 and stop selling “bump stock” attachments, he said. “The students’ concerns really resonated with him and he made it clear he wanted to be part of the solution,” Spano said.

The students met with Krause and with the City Council, leading city officials to review what power they had to regulate firearm sales.

Ruby Stillman, an incoming junior at St. Louis Park High involved in the discussions, said she felt empowered by the council’s decision to develop stricter policies.

“The fact that the city is taking our concerns seriously and really making an effort to look into every possibility for changing things makes me very proud,” Stillman, 15, said.

Isaac Wahl, another incoming junior who spoke with the council, said its actions could lead other cities to look at their own policies.

“I am extremely happy that the city of St. Louis Park is taking steps,” Wahl, 16, said. “Whether they’re huge steps or small steps, it makes a difference.”

The council is interested in meeting with the St. Louis Park school board this fall to speak about school safety, according to Harmening.

**Miguel Otárola** is a reporter covering Minneapolis City Hall for the Star Tribune. He previously covered Minneapolis’ western suburbs and breaking news. He also writes about immigration and music on occasion.

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# MAYOR'S YOUTH COUNCILS

## Mayor's Youth Councils: Connecting Youth to Civic Participation

Across the country, mayors support youth civic engagement in their communities through Mayor's Youth Councils (MYC). Participating youth gain knowledge about local government and civic engagement, develop leadership and citizenship skills and become equipped to be the community leaders of tomorrow. Mayors gain insight into issues important to youth and can tap into youth energy and perspective to address community-wide areas of concern.

This brief provides an overview of what MYCs look like, key benefits to participating youth and resources to consider when looking to build an MYC for your community.

### What is a Mayor's Youth Council?

A Mayor's Youth Council is a representative group of high school students who serve as a liaison between youth and local government. While MYCs vary in format, most consist of 8-20 high school juniors and seniors serving for one or two-year terms. MYCs typically meet weekly or monthly, attend City Council meetings and have regular (i.e., quarterly) meetings with the mayor.

MYCs connect youth to civic participation and educate youth about the civic process. Participating youth engage in community and policy issues of city or countywide importance and can provide direct input on government policies and practices that affect young people. MYC participants advise the mayor and his or her administration on issues important to youth and act as a communication link between the mayor and the young people in the community.

#### WHAT MYCS DO

- Advise the mayor and his or her administration on issues important to youth.
- Inject the energy, optimism and realism of youth perspective into local government.
- Complete projects that make their city or county a better place to live.
- Survey their peers for youth input on policymaking.
- Connect other youth with underutilized city or county programs.
- Promote the work and programs of the mayor's administration.

#### SUCCESSFUL MYCS HAVE

- A defined goal to achieve.
- Regular meetings with the mayor.
- Mentors from outside city or county government.
- Structured MYC alumni networks.
- A mayor who reminds all his or her department heads to use the MYC as a resource.
- A set meeting space and schedule.
- A program to train and develop skills in areas like leadership, community organizing and government policy.

## Launching a Mayor's Youth Council

Mayors considering launching a MYC need not start from scratch. Mayors and their staff in cities or counties with MYCs can share their experiences and lessons learned to help guide your first steps.

For example, MYCs typically have an application process to solicit participants. Look to existing MYC applications as a starting point for format and content guidance. In the examples below, questions include those to identify key issues or challenges youth perceive within their communities and how they propose the MYC or the city could address those challenges. Some MYC applications also ask for student resumes, volunteer activity, school performance records and letters of recommendation from community members.



Chattanooga Mayor's Youth Council

## MYC APPLICATIONS

### • Jackson, Mississippi

The Jackson MYC requires two letters of recommendation from a school administrator, teacher or community leader. The MYC application has four sections: (1) applicant information; (2) a student and parental or guardian pledge to sign; (3) short answer questions; and (4) a short essay. Students receive an application from their high school counselor or city website and return completed applications to the city.

<http://www.jacksonms.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3836>

### • Nashville, Tennessee

Nashville's MYC application collects student information, short answers, parental or guardian permission and two recommendations from a community or school leader familiar with the student's background. Rather than require a recommendation letter, Nashville provides a recommendation form for the reference to describe the applicant. The form includes five questions: (1) In what capacity and how long have you known the applicant?; (2) What would you consider to be the applicant's strengths?; (3) What would you consider to be the applicant's greatest area for improvement?; (4) Give an example of how this candidate takes personal initiative; and (5) Discuss the applicant's ability to effectively communicate with others (peers, adults).

<https://www.nashville.gov/Portals/0/SiteContent/MayorsOffice/Youth/MYCApplcation2018-19.pdf>

### • Chattanooga, Tennessee

Chattanooga's MYC uses an online application process. High school juniors and seniors living in the city limits submit application information through a SurveyMonkey tool housed on the MYC website. Acknowledging the time commitment required for MYC participation, the application asks students what other obligations and activities will require their commitment and time during their potential MYC term. The application also includes short answer questions, including, "Describe a time (big or small) when you demonstrated leadership by working with others to create positive change." and "What specific skill set can you bring to the MYC, and how will you use it?"

**MYC website:** <https://connect.chattanooga.gov/myc/>

**Application link (live only during application process):** <https://jfreeman38.wufoo.com/forms/q1ik74sz1t0lapj/>

## GUIDES AND RESOURCES

Through their Authentic Youth Engagement program, the National League of Cities' (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families has developed materials for mayors considering starting a MYC.

- **Youth Engagement Resources**

This toolkit provides resources to support efforts at building successful MYCs.

<https://www.nlc.org/program-initiative/authentic-youth-civic-engagement>

The resources include:

- **Starting a Youth Council**

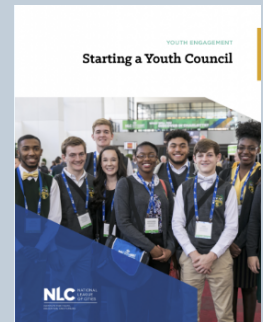
This guide outlines some key first steps and considerations including processes for authorization of, and funding support for, MYCs.

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/starting-a-youth-council>

- **Authentic Youth Civic Engagement**

This strategy guide is designed as a starting point for mayors and staff wanting to actively and authentically bring local youth into the process as real partners at the table.

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/strategy-guide-authentic-youth-civic-engagement>



## MYC EXAMPLES

### **Boston, Massachusetts**

Boston Mayor Thomas Menino (1993-2014) established a Mayor's Youth Council in 1995 to provide Boston's young people with an active role in addressing youth issues. MYC participants shared existing opportunities within the city with Boston teens and met regularly with Mayor Menino to share their concerns and suggest improvements the city could make in youth-oriented efforts.

The city views benefits of the MYC as increasing voter participation from younger demographics, connecting youth to city government and educating youth about the civic process. Boston's MYC includes youth-led committees with goals to increase youth access and engagement on key issues like education, civic engagement, arts and culture, public health and safety and workforce and economic development. Participant's of Boston's MYC must be entering 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade (or be a comparable age if not currently in school), and they must be a resident of the City of Boston.



### **Houston, Texas**

The Houston MYC started in 1998 and is modeled after the city's elected City Council with 22 members representing 11 Council districts and 5 at-large members. High school students in grades 9-12 who reside within the city limits may serve terms on the MYC that begin in the fall after school starts and end in May.

The MYC's mission is to promote civic engagement in youth by providing high school students with opportunities to learn about city government, develop leadership skills and bring awareness to issues that are important to Houston's youth. The MYC is guided by By-laws outlining the mission and purpose of the organization (see Sources).

## MYC EXAMPLES

### Papillion, Nebraska

The City of Papillion (population 19,539) has a Mayor's Youth Leadership Council to civically engage and challenge students in grades 7-12. The city works with the MYC to hear the youths' perspectives to help identify solutions to challenges and to build stronger communities. The council meets monthly and serves as a voice for local youth to identify and solve issues they face in the community.



Papillion Mayor's Youth Leadership Council

### Pascagoula, Mississippi

The City of Pascagoula's (population 21,733) MYC provides a forum for 10th - 12th grade students from the city's two high schools to be involved in pertinent issues in the community and municipal government while promoting civic engagement.

Pascagoula's MYC terms of membership begin in May and end in April of the following year. The MYC is directed by an Executive Committee consisting of the Mayor, Vice-Mayor, Clerk of Council, City Manager and Sergeant at Arms. The Executive Committee is responsible for leading the meetings and coordinating events and volunteer opportunities. The MYC also consists of Council Committees of youth participants focused on identifying leadership, social, communication and volunteer opportunities.



Douglas Mayor's Youth Council

### Douglas, Georgia

The MYC in the City of Douglas (population 11,430) helps initiate and foster leadership among youth through education and outreach. The MYC is a nine-member council of high school students advising policymakers on youth issues. The MYC meets twice monthly, with members serving one to four-year terms.

The Douglas MYC provides an opportunity for municipal leaders to communicate directly with youth on issues like school violence, underage drinking, peer pressure and community involvement. MYC members support youth initiatives to improve community relations between adults and youth through service projects, youth forums and summits and mentoring opportunities.

## SOURCES

- Jackson Mayor's Youth Council: <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/local/2018/10/30/17-jackson-students-inducted-into-mayors-youth-council/1816632002/>
- Nashville Mayor's Youth Council: <https://www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Neighborhoods/Youth/Mayors-Youth-Council.aspx>
- Chattanooga Mayor's Youth Council: <https://connect.chattanooga.gov/myc/>
- Boston Mayor's Youth Council: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/youth-engagement-and-employment/mayors-youth-council>; and <https://www.cityofboston.gov/news/Default.aspx?id=2592>
- Houston Mayor's Youth Council: <http://www.houstontx.gov/myc/>
- Houston Mayor's Youth Council By-laws: <https://www.houstontx.gov/myc/myc-bylaws.pdf>
- Papillion Mayor's Youth Leadership Council: <https://www.papillion.org/502/Mayors-Youth-Leadership-Council>
- Pascagoula Mayor's Youth Council: <https://www.cityofpascagoula.com/DocumentCenter/View/2941/PMYC-General-Information-2019>
- Douglas Mayor's Youth Council: <https://www.cityofdouglas.com/DocumentCenter/View/5909>

# Youth Leaders Reflect on the 2019 Congressional City Conference



By [NLC Staff](#) in [Cities - General](#), [Education](#), [General](#), [Youth](#) on [March 29, 2019](#)

*This is a guest post written by Barry Dechtman, Ivanna Fregoso, Su Bin Chang, and Esmeralda Aquilar, members of the [NLC youth delegates](#)*

*[program](#).*

We were proud and excited to be among the 181 strong youth leaders from 35 cities across the country who came together at the 2019 Congressional City Conference.

The youth delegate program at National League of Cities (NLC) conferences helps advocates by successfully encapsulating the idea of youth voice. Youth leaders worldwide are starting to lead and inspire local, regional and national change. There's no limit to where their influence spreads, and this year's Congressional City Conference was no exception.

## *International and National Youth Advocacy*

One of the most impactful sessions for us was "Pooling the Power of Youth Voice in the U.S. and Internationally." Leaders from several national and global agencies and organizations introduced youth to opportunities for engagement. Our peers left the workshop more knowledgeable about national and global involvement, and it was a privilege to interact with such avid leaders.

Youth leaders met with U.N.-Habitat representative Ahmet Sogutkas, Peace Corps Director Jody Olsen, Chair of the Interagency Working Group for Youth Programs Cheri Hoffman, and Ambassador Jennifer Galt of the U.S. Department of State.

## *Youth Lead on Key Social Issues*



During the conference, youth delegates discussed social issues concerning their cities while sharing initiatives and projects to take back home. Youth chose to focus discussions on youth mental health, educational equity, school safety, climate change, voting access, marijuana legalization, equal opportunities for members of the LGBTQ+ community, mass incarceration and school safety.

During the program, delegates listened to a panel of federal officials including: Maisha Meminger from the Department of Labor, Lee Tanner from the Environmental Protection Agency, Denisha Merriweather from the Department of Education, Tia Renier from AmeriCorps, and Anstice Brand from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This panel was a great platform for youth delegates to understand the purpose of federal agencies and ask questions about issues concerning them.

### *Youth Usage of Data and Social Media*

During this portion of the youth delegate program, youth created a mock social media page and identified how data could be used as an advocacy tool. The purpose of this workshop was to create a better foundation to properly advocate projects and receive the support we need to create change.

This year's Congressional City Conference Youth Delegate Program was a success, and we eagerly await the upcoming City Summit in San Antonio, Texas.

*NLC encourages the participation of current high school students at both its annual Congress of Cities in November and its Congressional City Conference in March.*

### ***About the Authors:***

*Barry Dechtman is a junior at East High School in Denver. He is an accomplished saxophonist and state champion tennis player. Barry also serves as the chair on the Denver Mayor's Youth Commission.*

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