Engaging young people in democracy

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NOTE TO USERS
ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE
IN DEMOCRACY

by

Hilarie Hicks Robison

Bachelor of Arts
summa cum laude
Brigham Young University
1997

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Ethics and Policy Studies
Department of Ethics and Policy Studies
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Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2004
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Engaging Young People in Democracy

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ABSTRACT

Engaging Young People in Democracy

by

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As young people’s civic and political participation continues to decline, a number of organizations are working to reverse the decline by increasing opportunities for youth to participate. Communities around the country are taking steps to engage young people through a variety of methods that allow youth to actually participate in policy development and take action on local issues. The effectiveness of such community programs on long-term civic engagement is not well documented, however. This paper presents preliminary research about the effectiveness of one community participation program, the Southern Nevada Water Authority’s Youth Advisory Council. Quantitative and anecdotal evidence, while not conclusive, suggest this community problem solving approach may encourage its participants to engage in other civic and political activities. The paper also discusses the benefits that organizations and communities receive when young people participate in this way, and provides recommendations for developing a similar youth participation program.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today more than ever, young people are disengaged from civic and political life. Along with a significant decline in voting levels, rates of attentiveness to government and public affairs, group participation and leadership, and community activism are all much lower than in previous generations. This is cause for concern in a democratic society that depends on citizen participation. Scholars, activists, and organizations are attempting to increase youth civic engagement through a variety of programs and initiatives, few of which have been well documented. Longitudinal studies demonstrating the program effects, over time, on activities like voting, volunteering, and civic activism are necessary to show where resources should be allocated to best address this issue. One promising option that has not yet been tested is to engage young people in addressing community issues at the local level.

In an effort to gauge the effectiveness of such a community approach, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) Youth Advisory Council (YAC) will be used as a case study. Quantitative pre- and post-questionnaires, longitudinal surveys, and comparison with identical items on a national survey were used to measure the long-term effectiveness of this particular community participation program on civic attitudes and behaviors. This study will continue each year and eventually provide more definitive
conclusions; the early results reported here indicate the community-based approach can be effective in promoting youth civic engagement.

**Background**

Since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1972, the numbers of 18-24 year olds who vote in elections has steadily declined, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.\(^1\) Compared with the same age cohort in years past, levels of voting have declined significantly. Voting may be the most visible, but it is certainly not the only way to participate in a democracy. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam includes the following in his definition of civic engagement or “social capital:” political participation; civic participation; religious participation; workplace connections; informal social connections; altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy; reciprocity, honesty, and trust. With the exception of volunteering, young people’s participation in all of the social capital measures has significantly declined over the last two decades.\(^2\)
These low levels of participation are cause for concern in a democratic society that requires citizen participation in the processes of governance. Several individuals and organizations working in the field of civic engagement have conducted research and compiled data to determine the extent of young people's disengagement from civic and political life. In fact, national foundations have even funded major ongoing projects to address these concerns. Given this documentation, no one seems to dispute the fact that young people are disengaged, and they all agree that something should be done to remedy the situation; differences arise when determining the best method to do so, and who is responsible for such policies and programs. The question is not whether young people need to be engaged, but how to effectively engage them.

Activists and researchers that are involved in this discussion could be described in two major camps. One camp is focused on the school environment, specifically reviving civic education in the classroom as a means to increase youth voting and other forms of participation. The second camp is more community-based, composed of activists and
non-profit organizations attempting to engage young people by involving them in
community projects and processes of governance at the local level, outside the classroom.
Researchers and academics are involved in both camps, working to document needs,
programs and outcomes.

Before describing the two camps, it is important to note that activity on this issue
of youth civic engagement is taking place largely at the local level. There has been some
policy discussion at the federal level (primarily related to the Younger Americans Act\textsuperscript{5}),
and some states have developed statewide youth policies,\textsuperscript{6} but the vast majority of
policies and programs attempting to increase young people’s civic engagement are found
in communities large and small across the nation. This is not to say that such community
policies and programs are working in isolation, however. Several networks and research
organizations help maintain the discussion and momentum. Information and ideas are
shared on a national scope, which helps drive policies and programs at the local level.
For example, the Pew Charitable Trusts funds the Center for Information and Research
on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), based at the University of Maryland.
CIRCLE conducts research and develops program templates, which are disseminated on a
national basis and used to build and improve local programs.

The first camp mentioned above is almost entirely curriculum-based and includes
nationally sponsored programs for use in school classrooms, as directed by state or local
education policies. Examples include “We the People” developed by the Center for Civic
Education, and “Destination Democracy” and “Civics Alive” by Kids Voting USA.
Many of them are role-playing or modeling programs, in which students cast ballots in a
mock election or mimic a congressional debate, for example. Service learning is
currently a popular trend being incorporated in many schools across the nation. It is based on the concept that learning is maximized when students participate in a service project related to their classroom curriculum. The service project ideally carries the students from the realm of their school to the broader community, thereby creating a bridge to the second camp.

The second camp has gained significant momentum over the last five years, with more and more communities and organizations developing policies and programs to provide civic participation experiences for young people. The methods range widely and can include, among other things, opportunities for young people to serve on decision-making councils (such as school boards or planning commissions), provide input to elected officials, lobby for a cause, or participate in a leadership development curriculum. Some such opportunities are informal and many are led by young people themselves. Others are a result of a specific policy and/or program sponsored by an organization (often a community non-profit) interested in engaging youth.

Many local government agencies have public participation policies to include members of the public in their decision-making processes (such as through citizen advisory committees). Some have extended that policy (often unofficially) to include young people’s input when developing public policy, using the reasoning that youth are the ones who will have to live with the long-term implications of policies made today. For example, decisions made relative to natural resources will have a greater effect on future generations than on those who are actually determining the policies today. Sometimes involving youth in setting policy is also tied to a hands-on community project designed to address a local issue. There is an assumption that this method of allowing
youth to actually participate in the policy-making process and/or address local
community issues through projects, will encourage them to continue to participate in
civic life. Actual changes in policy outcomes, as well as development of new projects
and/or programs, demonstrate the benefits to the community that accrue when young
people participate with local government agencies; impacts on young people's
participation over time are not yet known.

Research Problem

The first camp, civic education, has been able to document some successes,
through the efforts of the national Center for Civic Education. The Center is a nonprofit,
nonpartisan organization whose mission is to promote an enlightened and responsible
citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of
democracy. To fulfill this mission, the Center develops curricula for classroom use.
Their current program for high school students, called “We the People,” is a prime
example of the civic education approach.

The primary goal of We the People is to promote civic competence and
responsibility among the nation’s students. The curriculum enhances students’
understanding of the institutions of American constitutional democracy and their
contemporary relevance. The culminating activity is a simulated congressional hearing in
which students “testify” before a panel of judges. Students demonstrate their knowledge
and understanding of constitutional principles and have opportunities to evaluate, take,
and defend positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues.\footnote{7}
Two advantages of a school-based civic education approach are readily apparent. First, young people in a classroom are a captive audience and, in theory, every youth attends school (although not all schools utilize civic education programs). This formal teaching environment makes possible the second advantage: in a school setting, students can be held accountable for their participation and learning through testing and grading criteria. One criticism, however, is that teachers have limited resources and are already overwhelmed with required teaching material, so many are unwilling or unable to promote civic engagement unless they are mandated to do so.

Some critics of this approach claim that teaching about civics does not necessarily translate into civic engagement, but the Center for Civic Education has made efforts to prove that their curriculum does influence civic behavior. In February 2001 the Center conducted the first survey of alumni from the We the People program. Because respondents were self-selected, the findings are not generalizable to all We the People alumni; nevertheless, the results are encouraging, and the Center is continuing to gather more data.

We the People alumni were compared with a national probability study from the 2000 National Election Studies (NES) of young people in the same age group of 18- to 30-year-olds. Alumni were also compared with over 260,000 American college freshmen (The American Freshman: National Norms For Fall 1999). Key findings include:

- 82% of alumni reported voting in November 2000, in contrast to 48% of those surveyed in the NES study
- 74% of alumni held that it was essential or very important to keep up to date with political affairs in contrast to only 23% of American college freshmen
Since January of 2000, 16% of respondents had volunteered to work for a candidate running for office; 10% had made a financial campaign contribution; 33% had taken part in a protest, march or demonstration on a national or local issue; only 3% of NES respondents had taken part in any of these activities.

34% of alumni, in contrast to 9% of NES respondents, had contacted a federal elected official or staff; 37% had contacted state or local level elected officials or their staff.

48% of alumni thought influencing the political structure was essential or very important, while only 14% of college freshmen agreed.

Alumni surveyed in this study appear to be better informed and participate at higher rates than their peers. The data suggest that civic education may increase youth voter turnout.

No such data is available for community-based approaches to civic engagement. This category is broad and can include everything from youth leadership programs to youth representatives on decision-making councils or elected boards. Though many programs are occurring throughout the country, their impact and outcomes have not been documented. Nevertheless, the argument can be made that such programs are valuable because they engage young people in real-life issues, providing opportunities for them to actually impact policy. By allowing them to address a real issue at the local level and take action on it, such community programs help young people realize that their input is valued and their actions really can make a difference. Additionally, such activities are usually organized or sponsored by a local government agency or non-profit organization. While they do not have the advantages of a captive audience and mandatory attendance with accountability measures, they generally have more time and resources to devote to civic engagement than do classroom teachers. By voluntarily providing opportunities for
community problem solving, the sponsoring organization demonstrates a strong interest and investment in promoting youth civic engagement.

One example of a community-based program is the Southern Nevada Water Authority Youth Advisory Council in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) is a not-for-profit quasi-municipal agency governing water resources on a regional level in Southern Nevada. The authority launched its Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in 1999 to involve young people in decisions related to scarce water resources. The YAC consists of 25-30 students representing local public and private high schools. The first task of their yearlong tenure is to learn about local and regional water issues. With that knowledge, students select a specific water issue or area of focus. Based on their selected topic, the YAC then plans and implements a community project and/or develops policy recommendations for the SNWA Board of Directors, composed of regional elected officials. For example, different groups have created projects and recommendations to address water conservation outreach and advertising, nonpoint source pollution, and desert landscaping.  

The benefits to the community are tangible when young people get involved and take action. The long-term effects on the civic engagement of participants, however, are as yet unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such involvement can promote other forms of civic participation. YAC members have made the following comments following their participation on the council:

- "I felt like I could do something to help change things."
- "I had the chance to make a difference in my community."
- "This experience has helped me improve my leadership, political and debating skills."

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• "I now understand more about the world around me (i.e. politics); I have also learned more about group dynamics and leadership."

Admittedly, participants in the YAC are usually those who are involved in school activities already, because they are selected by school administrators. Nevertheless, there is value in tracking their voting and participation habits over time, as they can be compared to their peers to see if the YAC program is effective in promoting civic engagement. Such data could serve as an illustration of the effects of the community-based approach. Without this data, it is unclear what effects, if any, community problem-solving experiences have on civic engagement.

Long-term data on the impact of community-based engagement programs is the missing link in the current youth engagement discussion. While the data on the civic education approach is encouraging, we do not know how its effects compare with the community initiative approach. The SNWA YAC is one example of a community approach to youth civic engagement. In the chapters that follow, research on the program’s effectiveness in terms of civic engagement is presented. While additional research is recommended, these findings are promising and indicate the community approach has the potential to be more effective than civic education in engaging young people in democracy.

1 Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, www.civicyouth.org


3 Nationally-known organizations involved in this field include: The Center for Civic Education, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Forum for Youth Investment, National Youth Development Information Center, National League of Cities, YMCA, Innovation Center for Community and Youth
Development, California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development, Youth Service America, National Youth Leadership Council, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, National 4-H Council, Prudential Youth Leadership Institute, Activism 2000 Project, Kids Voting USA, and YouthBuild USA.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) was developed by and receives ongoing funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The Younger Americans Act (as proposed in H.R. 17, 2001) has four major components: assure young people have access to the five tenets of America’s Promise; coordinate a national youth policy; provide grants for state programs; and provide funds for research and evaluation of programs. For more details, see Chapter 3.

Iowa and Massachusetts are good examples. For more details, see Chapter 3.

See [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org)

See [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org) for the complete report.

See [www.snwa.com](http://www.snwa.com)
CHAPTER 2

THE (DIS)ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG AMERICANS

Introduction

In his well-known book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam uses a variety of data sources to document the decline of “social capital” in America. Social capital refers to the collective value of all “social networks” (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (“norms of reciprocity”). Connections among individuals, relationships, and social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam 19). Putnam’s book presents dozens of measures that all show a significant decline in activities that contribute to social capital, or civic engagement. The decline, while significant for all ages, has been sharpest among the younger generations. This chapter explores data, from Putnam and other researchers, on youth civic engagement. The research indicates that young people’s participation is lower than in years past and has been declining for the last several decades.

After reviewing possible causes of youth disengagement, the chapter goes on to argue that youth civic engagement is important for young people themselves, broader society and even the maintenance of democracy.
Declining Engagement

Putnam uses several studies and indexes to measure social capital. He cites data measuring participation in the following activities to document a sharp decline in social capital since the 1960s.

1) political participation (voting, serving in clubs or organizations, working for a political party or running for office, attending a public meeting or political rally, making a speech, writing a politician or newspaper, signing a petition)
2) civic participation (involvement in non-political voluntary organizations)
3) religious participation
4) connections in the workplace
5) informal social connections (socializing with friends, talking with neighbors, etc.)
6) altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy
7) reciprocity, honesty, and trust

Putnam finds that the downturn in participation is nearly universal: “virtually no corner of American society has been immune to this anticivic contagion” (247). The one striking exception to this uniformity is age. Age is second only to education level as a predictor of engagement; participation typically varies by age, with middle-aged and older people being more involved. This has been true for generations, due to life cycle changes that provide motivation, ability, and time for participation as citizens progress through life. Yet today’s significantly lower participation rates for young people are not entirely attributable to life cycle effects. Instead, they are linked to generational effects, a change in society itself instead of individuals as their lives progress. This is evident when participation rates of young people are compared over time, illustrated through
voter turnout in Figures 1 and 2 (see Chapter 1). Compared with the same age cohort in years past, all forms of civic engagement have declined sharply (with the exception of volunteering, which is addressed below). Thus while young people's participation may increase with the life cycle, as has that of previous generations, it is highly unlikely that it will ever reach current levels of older cohorts.

Voting is only one of many avenues for participation. Figure 3 illustrates drops in voting along with seven other activities that contribute to social capital or civic engagement, documented by year of birth. People born in the 1960s and 1970s participate much less frequently than did their parents and grandparents at the same age. Because education levels have increased in recent decades (which in itself should have signaled an increase in participation), education was held constant so as to not skew the results. The decline is fairly steady on all eight indicators, falling from an average of 60.6 percent participation for those born in 1900 to an average of 27.8 percent participation across the eight indicators for those born in 1970. Voting in presidential elections fell from 85 percent for those born in 1900 to 45 percent of those born in 1970. The sharpest decline is for reading the newspaper: 80 percent of those born in 1900 read the paper daily, while only 28 percent of those born in 1970 do so. Being a member of a group fell from 70 percent of those born in 1900 to 58 percent of those born in 1970. People indicating they were interested in politics dropped from 62 percent of those born in 1900 to 30 percent of those born in 1970. Of those born in 1900, 50 percent believed "most people can be trusted," while only 19 percent of those born in 1970 felt the same way. Not surprisingly, more of the older generations attended church regularly: 52 percent of those born in 1900 compared to 16 percent of those born in 1970. For those
born in 1900, 37 percent worked on a community project, while 18 percent of those born in 1970 did the same. Fewer younger people also attend a club regularly: only 8 percent of those born in 1970, compared with 49 percent of those born in 1900.

![Figure 3: Generational Trends in Civic Engagement](Figure recreated from Putnam 253.)

In their book *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Verba, Schlozman and Brady present and analyze findings that in some ways run contrary to Putnam’s picture of declining participation. While Verba, et al, acknowledge that voting levels have decreased significantly, they argue that some other forms of participation increased from 1967 to 1987. For that 20-year time span, they cite data indicating that respondents’ participation in the following activities actually increased (Verba et al 72):

- persuading others how to vote increased from 28% to 32%
- contributing money to a party or candidate rose from 13% to 23%
- contacting state or national officials increased from 11% to 22%
- working with others to address a local problem rose from 30% to 34%.

These findings are for the general population and are not broken down by age group, so it is unknown to what extent young people’s participation is captured in the statistics.

While Verba et al may show Americans participating in these ways instead of voting, based on evidence from other researchers, that does not appear to be the case for their children.

The cohort of young people that have record low rates of participation are typically called Generation X. Putnam defines this generation as those born between 1965 and 1980. Other researchers close the generation at 1976 (see Keeter et al) or 1978 (see Soule). The next successive generation, those born after 1976, 1978, or 1980, have been called Generation Y or the DotNet Generation. The same low rates of participation seem evident with this generation, although they are still so young that it is difficult to acquire adequate data (see Delli Carpini; Soule; and Keeter et al).

The one exception to young people’s disengagement is in the area of volunteering. Surprisingly, Generations X and Y volunteer more than their parents and grandparents do currently, as well as more than previous generations at the same age. Forty-two percent of college freshmen in 1998 volunteered regularly, compared with 27 percent in 1987 (Putnam 265). As presented in Figure 4 below, 22 percent of Matures report volunteering, compared with 32 percent for both Boomers and GenX, and 40 percent for DotNets or Generation Y (Keeter et al 19).

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Most of the volunteering done by young people, however, is of a unique and specific sort. Often, young people are volunteering in unrelated and separate instances, such as cleaning trash or tutoring. While these activities are commendable, "what is missing is an awareness of the connection between the individual, isolated problems these actions are intended to address and the larger world of public policy" (Gibson 4). A study of 18-24 year-olds by the National Association of Secretaries of State found that there was no statistical relationship between voluntary service and participation in other political or civic activities: "performing voluntary service does not increase the likelihood of youth being involved in or connected to politics in a significant way" (Gibson 10; also see Delli Carpini 342). Additionally, much of the volunteering is mandated by high school and college requirements. For example, only 25 percent of young adults who are not in high school or college report any volunteering, compared with 54 percent of high school students and 41 percent among college students (Keeter et al 19; see also Putnam 17).
So while many young people are volunteering, the conditions in which they perform the service do not necessarily signal a victory for civic engagement.

Putnam is not the only scholar to document the civic disengagement of young people. Several other organizations and individuals interested in civic engagement and/or youth have studied the younger cohorts, Generations X and Y. Their data largely support Putnam's conclusions, but some highlights and distinctions are worth noting.

One such report, "The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait," was prepared by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Here, Generation X is defined as those born between 1964 and 1976, while the DotNet Generation (known elsewhere as Generation Y) consists of young people born after 1976. As did Putnam, these investigators found a downward generational spiral related to voting, with 72 percent of matures reporting that they always vote, while only 53 percent of baby boomers, 34 percent of Xers and 24 percent of DotNets responded the same way. In 1972, 42 percent of those age 18-24 voted, but by 2000, only 28 percent of the same cohort did (Gibson 2). The younger generations are also less likely to display a candidate or party preference by wearing buttons and displaying stickers or signs (Keeter et al 10).

The report by CIRCLE contrasts electoral activities, like those just described, with civic activities, which include working with others to solve a community problem, participating in activities or fundraisers for charity, doing volunteer work, and active participation in a nonpolitical group or organization. In these civic categories, the younger cohorts rate much better than in the electoral activities. For example, a significant number of younger people are participating in community problem solving.
and activities for charity (see Figures 5 and 6). Almost as many Dot Nets and GenXers participated in community problem solving in the last year as did Baby Boomers (21 and 22 percent, respectively, compared with 25 percent). Only 15 percent of Matures reported that type of activity. In the last year, 28 percent of DotNets and 29 percent of GenX participated in a charitable activity, as did 37 percent of Boomers and 26 percent of Matures. The younger generations still have not surpassed the older generations, but the gaps are much smaller in these categories, indicating that the difference may be related to life cycle changes instead of generational changes.

(Figures created with data from Keeter et al 11-12.)
The larger gap returns, however, when looking at attentiveness to politics and public affairs, displayed in Figure 7: only 37 percent of GenX and 24 percent of DotNets claim to follow politics and government “most of the time,” compared with 60 percent of Matures and 50 percent of Baby Boomers (Keeter et al 15).

While on the surface attentiveness to politics may not seem overly important, these data are alarming for two reasons. First, the difference between 24 and 60 percent from the youngest to oldest cohort is significant, perhaps so large that it is unrealistic to think the gap will close, even with life cycle development. Second, attentiveness is a critical measure, as it is a harbinger of other political and civic activities. In a democracy, public affairs should be the domain of all citizens, yet if they are unaware of issues and events, it is difficult to imagine that they will exercise their capacities for effective citizenship (Keeter et al 15-16).
Still using the categories of electoral contrasted with civic activities, this report quantifies the engagement of Americans. Participating in two or more of the following activities qualifies someone to be electorally engaged, according to the CIRCLE report:

- “always voting”—self reported (or for youth under 20, an intention to always vote)
- volunteering for a political organization or candidate
- trying to persuade someone how to vote
- displaying a button, bumper sticker or sign on behalf of a candidate
- contributing money to a candidate or party in the past 12 months (Keeter et al 24).

To be civically engaged, one must participate in two or more of these activities:

- regular volunteering for an organization other than a candidate or political party
- working with others to solve a community problem in the past year
- raising money for a charity in the past year
- actively participating in a group or association (Keeter et al 23).

Based on data already presented, it is no surprise that, compared with the general population, younger cohorts are more disengaged from both electoral and civic activities (57 percent compared to 48 percent). However, among those that are engaged, young people are more inclined civically, while the general population is more active electorally (see Figures 8 and 9). Small numbers of young people are active both civically and electorally, participating in at least two activities in both categories.
Because volunteering is one of the activities that constitute civic engagement in this study, school-mandated volunteering is also included. Earlier, a study was cited that found volunteering is about twice as common among young people in school compared with those not enrolled in high school or college (Keeter et al 19). This may partially
explain why young people’s involvement is weighted toward civic activities, when the
general population participates more in electoral activities.

Further evidence of young people’s disengagement is compiled and presented by
Michael X. Delli Carpini, a former professor of political science at Columbia University
and currently Director of the Public Policy Program for the Pew Charitable Trusts. He
draws on a variety of sources to demonstrate that, whether compared with older
Americans or with younger Americans from earlier years, today’s young adults are
significantly:

- less trusting of their fellow citizens
- less interested in politics or public affairs
- less likely to feel a sense of identity, pride, or obligation associated with American
citizenship
- less knowledgeable about the substance or processes of politics
- less likely to read a newspaper or watch the news
- less likely to register or vote
- less likely to participate in politics beyond voting
- less likely to participate in community organizations designed to address public
problems through collective action or the formal policy process
- less likely to connect individual efforts to help solve problems with more traditional,
collective forms of civic engagement and
- less likely to think their participation in politics would make a difference.

For example, fewer than 20 percent of 18-29-year-olds in 1998 said they were
very proud of how democracy works in the United States, compared with 50 percent of
those 50 years old or older who felt that way. Only 26 percent of those between the ages
of 15 and 24 in 1998 believed “being involved in democracy and voting” is “extremely
important.” Also, 45 percent feel their vote does not matter regardless of who wins an election (Delli Carpini 341-342). According to another source, 68 percent of 18-34-year-olds say they feel disconnected from government in its entirety (Gibson 3). Delli Carpini’s report begins to hint at the causes behind youth disengagement, which will be explored in the next section.

The sources Delli Carpini uses to draw these conclusions (Delli Carpini 341-342) have some overlap with those used by Keeter, et al, but are different from Putnam’s sources. The findings sound like a broken record, though. Delli Carpini and Putnam seem to agree that “the current civic malaise that has engulfed America’s youth appears to be an ingrained generational characteristic rather than a stage in the life cycle that will remedy itself with time” (Delli Carpini 343).

In a report for the Center for Civic Education, Suzanne Soule analyzes data and arrives at the same foreboding conclusions: “over the past forty years, no generation has begun with such low levels of interest in politics. . . while Generations X and Y mirror usual youthful avoidance, the cohort gap in attention to public affairs is greater than it was for previous cohorts” (4). It is unlikely that life cycle changes will raise their engagement to the levels of previous generations.

The evidence is clear: young people are more disengaged from political and public life than both previous generations at the same age and any other current cohort. But what reasons explain this disengagement?
Causes of Disengagement

Putnam points out that although Generation X does show very low levels of social capital, they cannot necessarily be blamed for today’s troubles, because “the erosion of American social capital began before any Xer was born” (Putnam 259). Instead of initiating the decline, “this generation accelerated the tendencies to individualism found among boomers, for Xers are the second consecutive generation of free agents” (Putnam 259). According to Putnam, members of Generation X have an individualistic view of politics, emphasizing the personal and private over the public and collective. Having grown up in the technology age, many of them are media savvy and visually oriented. In many ways, their lives have been shaped by uncertainty—both in economic terms and because of the divorce explosion among their parents.

Additionally, Generation X lacks any kind of collective activity or force—such as wars or significant social movements—to build cohesiveness and forge a common identity for the generation. Years of relative peace and security, with focus on domestic affairs, have contributed to their inward, often materialistic focus. This growing materialism is documented by UCLA’s annual survey of college freshmen:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, 45-50 percent of incoming freshmen rated keeping up-to-date with politics and helping clean up the environment as very important personal objectives, compared with roughly 40 percent of them who rated “being very well off financially” that high. By 1998, as the last of the Xers entered college, three decades of growing materialism had reduced ratings for politics and the environment to 26 percent and 19 percent, respectively, while financial well-being had shot up to a rating of 75 percent (Putnam 259-260).

Perhaps because of scandals surrounding big business and high-ranking politicians, GenX is also less trusting of others and institutions (Putnam 259-260). From
1976 to 1995, the fraction of high school seniors who agreed that “most people can be trusted” was cut exactly in half, from 46 percent in 1976 to 23 percent in 1995 (Putnam 260-261). While they are not any less cynical about politics than their parents, according to Putnam, young people are less inclined to get involved themselves (Putnam 261).

Underlying beliefs and attitudes may help explain why young people are not participating in traditional ways. A 2002 survey of 15-25 year olds conducted for CIRCLE (Lake Snell Perry . . .) indicated:

- 49 percent say voting is not important
- 34 percent see voting as a choice versus 20 percent as a responsibility and only 9 percent as a duty
- 52 percent say they can make little or no difference in solving community problems
- 71 percent believe candidates would rather talk to older, wealthier people than to younger people
- 49 percent strongly believe politics is about politicians competing to get elected versus 32 percent who believe politics is the way average people get their say in government.

Parental attitudes and behaviors have a significant impact on young people and contribute to their beliefs and attitudes. Although half of young people surveyed reported that they did not discuss politics, government or current events with their parents, those that did were more likely to have civic-minded attitudes and behaviors. Of those who grew up with political discussion in the home, 75 percent are registered to vote (vs. 57 percent of those without political discussion in the home); 71 percent trust government (vs. 53 percent); 68 percent believe voting is important (vs. 33 percent); 57 percent believe politicians pay attention to their concerns (vs. 39 percent); and 56 percent believe
they can make a difference solving community problems (vs. 37 percent) (Lake Snell Perry . . .).

The data suggest many young people do not think their vote will make a difference, and this is complicated by what some analysts call the “cycle of mutual neglect.” Politicians do not target young people because the youth demographic does not vote in high numbers; yet many young people do not vote because the politicians do not make efforts to engage them or address issues in which they are interested. An additional factor that likely contributes to low participation is the transient nature of many 18-24 year olds. Some are in college and move every year; even those who enter the work force are often not yet settled and tend to move more often than older cohorts (Felchner 8).

Clearly, a variety of factors contribute to young people’s disengagement. While individual reasons for lack of participation in voting and other civic behaviors may vary, as a generation, young people are not feeling the need or desire to participate. But is this really a cause for concern? Why should we care whether or not they participate? Why is it necessary or desirable for young people to be engaged?

Participation Matters

Since this country’s founding, there has been ongoing debate about how much citizen participation is necessary and desirable in our democracy. From the beginning, there has been discussion about the extent to which government should be separated from the people. Alexander Hamilton is generally considered to have favored government by elites. In Federalist 15, he expresses concern that average citizens will not have the
necessary knowledge, and will be too focused on their personal, local interests, to govern appropriately: “All this [debating and passing laws] will be done . . . without that knowledge of national circumstances and reasons of state which is essential to right judgment, and with that strong predilection in favor of local objects which can hardly fail to mislead the decision” (Hamilton et al 111-112). Writing in this same vein, Walter Lippmann argued that the Founders built in checks and balances to address this concern about men not having knowledge beyond their personal interests: “the doctrine of checks and balances was the remedy of the federalist leaders for the problem of public opinion” (Lippmann 177).

Thomas Jefferson is often considered the people’s champion because of his belief that all men are capable of self-government. Lippmann argues that this democratic theory was only viable under special circumstances in small, self-contained, homogeneous communities. He argues,

Never has democratic theory been able to conceive itself in the context of a wide and unpredictable environment . . . . Conditions must approximate those of the isolated rural township . . . . The environment must be confined within the range of every man’s direct and certain knowledge (Lippmann 171).

The debate continued into the 20th century. While the United States is more democratic in the sense that the vote has been extended to all classes, races and genders of citizens, there are some who still believe government is best run by experts or elites, with the role of the average citizen limited to voting. In his 1922 book Public Opinion, Walter Lippmann articulates this position. He argues that men can only have knowledge about those activities that are within the scope of their experience, and “There is no prospect, in any time which we can conceive, that the whole invisible environment will
be so clear to all men that they will spontaneously arrive at sound public opinions on the whole business of government. And even if there were a prospect, it is extremely doubtful whether many of us would wish to be bothered, or would take the time to form an opinion on any and every form of social action which affects us” (Lippmann 197). Therefore, “it is on the men inside, working under conditions that are sound, that the daily administrations of society must rest” (Lippmann 251).

According to Lippmann, because ordinary men do not have knowledge or experience in national affairs (unless they are directly affected by them) and, especially, foreign affairs, they do not have the necessary capacity to make sound decisions about them. Therefore, governing should be left to those whose life circumstances have provided them with broad and varied experiences, for whom government is a life pursuit—namely, the experts. For Lippmann, the equation is straightforward: unless or until “the environment is so successfully reported that the realities of public life stand out sharply against self-centered opinion, the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality” (Lippmann 195). The debate did not end with Lippmann, but still continues today.

Despite these arguments about the fitness of average citizens to govern themselves, civic engagement is crucial in a democratic society. Particularly for young people, civic participation and experiences are necessary for two reasons. First, engagement is important for young people on an individual level. Social and political development of youth is necessary for them to mature and become competent, responsible, fulfilled individuals; collectively, such individuals maintain and build the
public morality of a free society. Second, youth civic engagement is equally important at
the societal or community level because participation in civic activities is necessary to
uphold democracy. These two reasons build on and support each other, as well-
developed and engaged individuals are the ones that most significantly contribute to our
democratic society and uphold its practices.

Robert Putnam suggests that civic participation contributes to democracy in two
different ways: through “internal” effects on the participants themselves as well as
“external” effects on society. Internally, those who participate develop “habits of
cooperation and public-spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in
public life” (Putnam 338). Externally, civic participation “allow[s] individuals to express
their interests and demands on government and to protect themselves from abuses of
power by their political leaders” (Putnam 338). Engagement is important on both levels,
each of which is discussed below.

Individual/Internal Effects

Participation in itself provides valuable experiences for young people. At the
individual level, civic participation “helps young people acquire knowledge and skills
which are relevant academically and vocationally . . . participation also increases a young
person’s sense of self-esteem and membership of society as an active stakeholder”
(Cutler 3). According to one researcher, the knowledge and skills young people gain
from participation have four aspects: knowledge of citizenship and government in
democracy, cognitive skills, participatory skills, and dispositions toward continued
involvement (Cutler 3). These skills contribute to the development and democratic
education of young people. Numerous philosophers and scholars have studied and
written in this vein; among them are John Stuart Mill and John Dewey.

John Stuart Mill recognized the positive effects of participatory democracy on
personal character development. He believed that without participation in public life, a
citizen “never thinks of any collective interest, of any objects to be pursued jointly with
others, but only in competition with them, and in some measure at their expense” (Mill
198). By contrast, the engaged citizen according to Mill “is called upon . . . to weigh
interests not his own; to be guided, in case of conflicting claims, by another rule than his
private partialities . . . He is made to feel himself one of the public, and whatever is for
their benefit to be for his benefit” (Mill 197-198). The skills and opportunities that come
with participation in a common cause of democracy seem especially valuable in today’s
society, in which the younger generations are particularly individualistic and materialistic
(as described earlier).

In On Liberty, Mill identifies two forms of self-government: collective self-
government and the government of each individual by himself. The latter is key to both
individual and social progress because “in proportion to the development of his
individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is, therefore, capable of
being more valuable to others” (Mill 78). Providing value to others and thereby creating
a sense of community and common cause are crucial in a democracy. Yet individuals
cannot entirely develop on their own; government can and should supply those conditions
that individuals cannot create themselves. So, “the most important point of excellence
which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of
the people themselves” (Mill 167). Representative democracy is the best form of
government for filling this role. Mill considers political participation to be the “school of public spirit” (Mill 198); participation in government allows for moral self-development because “it serves the public interest rather than the exclusive self-interest of participants” (Norton 48).

John Dewey also recognizes the importance of participation within a community as part of personal development. According to Dewey, “democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighborly community” (Dewey 213). Despite its name, Dewey’s “new individualism” is inherently social: people are shaped by their associations, need social resources to grow and learn, and their well-lived lives are of worth to others (Dewey 95-98). Dewey sees the problem of democracy as a need to feed, sustain, and direct the powers of individuals, providing them with continual capacity for growth. For Dewey, education tied to practical experience in social and political contexts accomplishes this goal. According to Robert Westbrook, Dewey was “the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is of the belief that democracy as an ethical ideal calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to fully realize his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life” (Westbrook vi). Being engaged in civic activities is an important and effective way for young people to realize their capacities.

In addition to the benefits young people receive from their own participation, Putnam cites evidence that youth development is powerfully shaped by the social capital or civic engagement of the community; in short, “social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids” (Putnam 296). States that score high on Putnam’s social capital
index are the same states where children flourish, according to the Kids Count index published annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Statistically, the correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find” (Putnam 297). Putnam also finds that states with higher social capital report better educational outcomes for young people, both because there is stronger community and family support for schools and learning, as well as the fact that children watch less television in high-social-capital states (Putnam 299-303). Based on Putnam’s compilation of research, a general atmosphere of engaged citizenry contributes in a variety of ways to the well being and social development of young people.

Societal/Community Effects

Numerous writers have also focused on the importance of youth engagement to society as a whole. Because “taking part in public decisions is at the heart of our democratic life” (Cutler 4), young people’s participation is beneficial to the larger community. The institutions of democracy cannot be maintained without public participation. Indeed, “establishing the habit of participation in the young is the best way to ensure that democracy flourishes in the future” (Cutler 4).

Putnam says it has been a truism for centuries that “democratic self-government requires an actively engaged citizenry” (336). Thomas Jefferson, who studied David Hume’s ideas of small geographic wards conducive to participation, believed that “making every citizen an acting member of the government, and in the offices nearest and most interesting to him, will attach him by his strongest feelings to the independence of his country, and its republican constitution” (Putnam 336). In short, democracy requires that citizens participate in government.
Putnam’s research in Italy (fully described in his book *Making Democracy Work*) indicates that social capital or civic engagement affects not only what goes into government, but, perhaps even more important, what comes out of it. Indeed, his evidence shows that government simply functions better in places with higher social capital. Civic engagement and social capital contribute to both the demand side and the supply side of government. Engaged citizens expect more of government, and, partly through their own efforts, they get it. On the supply side, the level of government performance is a function of civic institutions and values, and their manifestation at all levels of the community (Putnam 346-347).

There is fairly wide agreement that “government by the people” requires citizen participation. But does it really matter that individuals be engaged while they are young? The short answer is yes. Evidence indicates that “individuals who feel they can make a difference in their communities or believe they have a responsibility to get involved are more active than are those who do not hold these views” (Keeter et al 36); these attitudes harden over the course of one’s life, suggesting that the best way to “lay the groundwork for later engagement [is] by encouraging positive attitudes early on” (Keeter et al 36). Other studies also found that participating in high school “increase[s] civic engagement later in life, showing up most clearly in middle age” (Soule 11). Education and development theory tell us that the most effective way to achieve a desired habit or attitude is by instilling the appropriate knowledge, values, and behaviors in youngsters, while they are still “pliable.”

It may be that until young people are given significant roles in their communities, many will continue to stay disengaged—not only as youth, but when they become adults.
If they are not given a legitimate opportunity to be heard, young people lack the incentive to participate. Putnam cites a study that reveals “those who took part in voluntary associations [one component of social capital] in school were far more likely than nonparticipants to vote, take part in political campaigns, and discuss public issues two years after graduating” (Putnam 339). Opportunities for participation in public decision making and civic activities while young are critical. The scope and availability of such youth engagement opportunities will be explored in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a number of sources of data that show alarmingly low levels of engagement for young people. While rates of volunteering provide one exception, this type of participation holds little promise because much of it is mandated and/or disconnected from the larger issues of policy development and community problem solving. It is typical for people to participate less while they are young and more as they mature, but today’s levels of participation for youth are significantly lower than those of other cohorts at the same age. The disengagement of young people seems to be a generational change rather than a life cycle change.

While individual reasons for not participating may vary, the younger cohorts collectively have more negative attitudes about politics and government, think they do not have a role in it, and are less trusting. They are more materialistic and individualistic, without a crisis or social movement to cohere them. Anti-civic attitudes and behaviors are less pronounced among youth who discussed politics at home with their parents, although less than half report doing so.
I have argued that we should be concerned about young people's disengaged attitudes and behaviors. Their participation is important, both for their own personal intellectual and moral development, as well as for the community and society as a whole. The next chapter will explore avenues available for young people to participate in civic and political activities.

1 The exact amount of volunteering that is mandated is unknown. See Chapter 3 for a list of states that require community service for high school graduation.

2 Alexis de Tocqueville coined this use of individualism; he used it to mean a withdrawal from politics rather than a particular view of politics.

3 The tragedy and aftermath of September 11, 2001 may have recently had some effect, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work. See the Lake Snell Perry... report prepared for CIRCLE for some post-9/11 research.

4 The 2004 election will be interesting for analysis, as a variety of groups (including the Campaign for Young Voters, New Voters Project, and the Youth Vote Coalition) are working to mobilize the youth vote and to encourage candidates to target young voters.

5 James Madison addresses similar concerns in Federalist 51.

6 Interestingly, Mill also said, “No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few” (Mill 82).
CHAPTER 3

EFFORTS TO ENGAGE YOUTH

In a world that is now home to the largest-ever cohort of youth, it is critical to seriously consider how young people can exercise good citizenship. How are young people encouraged to be active participants in civic life? How do we ensure the involvement and contribution of young people? (Mohamed and Wheeler, Youth . . ., 3)

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion about the roles of both education and experience as complementary activities that contribute to civic engagement, followed by a review of actual and proposed policies that relate to youth engagement, at the national, state and local levels. Examples of several types of local youth engagement programs, within six categories, will be presented. While there is no national policy promoting youth civic engagement, there are a number of on-the-ground programs in communities across the nation. Many of them appear to be successful, but there is little empirical evidence to indicate which programs are most effective in engaging young people in the civic life of our democracy. Without such evidence, it is very difficult to determine which programs should be promoted and duplicated.
Education and Experience

One cannot jump-start republican citizenship without direct, face-to-face participation. Citizenship is not a spectator sport.

(Putnam 341)

The previous chapter documented the disengagement of young people and argued that civic engagement is important, for both young people themselves and the larger society. So, if it is important that young people be engaged, what can be done? Before looking at proposed and actual efforts to increase youth civic engagement, a brief discussion of two broad categories is appropriate: education in comparison and contrast with experience.

A common theme throughout western Enlightenment political philosophy is the “importance of education in developing the cognitive and moral qualities necessary for citizenship in a democratic polity” (Nie et al 12). Philosophers from Locke and Rousseau to Mill and Dewey have recognized the importance of democratic education for the development of citizenship. Indeed the institutions of education in this country were founded on such beliefs: “the public purpose of institutionalizing public schooling was to shape the young to become an enlightened electorate—so that democracy could be maintained, and so that effective and responsible leaders could emerge” (Jones-Wilson 32).

Political scientists Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry interpret democratic citizenship as having two dimensions, both of which are necessary conditions for the maintenance of democracy. The first dimension, political engagement, “signifies the capability of citizens to engage in self-rule and encompasses behaviors and cognitions necessary for identifying political preferences, understanding politics, and pursuing interests.” The
second dimension is democratic enlightenment, which signifies the "understanding of
democratic rule through knowledge and acceptance of the norms and procedures of
democracy" (Nie et al 11).

Education within a formal institutional setting typically focuses on the second
dimension—democratic enlightenment—but rarely works with students to achieve the
first dimension, political engagement. While a base of knowledge is necessary, it is
perhaps even more important to take young people the next step to actually experiencing
public and community processes for decision making and governance. Actual experience
provides greater impact and more significant meaning for participants, helping to create
an environment in which "a citizenry that is more committed to democratic values, as
well as one that has a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of democratic
processes, cannot help but provide greater protection for our democratic institutions and
practices" (Nie et al 194). Individuals cannot develop a sophisticated understanding of
democratic processes solely through classroom education or book learning. They need
experience practicing their democratic responsibilities and rights in order to truly
understand them.

French observer Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the hands-on government of
America. He commented, "True enlightenment is in the main born of experience . . . it is
by taking a share in legislation that the American learns to know the law; it is by
governing that he becomes educated about the formalities of government. The great
work of society is daily performed before his eyes, and so to say, under his hands"
(Tocqueville 304). It is through participation that citizens learn democratic rule and
become prepared to govern.
In ancient philosophical thought, Aristotle was concerned with developing civic virtue and helping individuals become whole persons. Education and knowledge are important to personal development because “the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general” (Aristotle 1095a). But education alone is not enough. According to Aristotle, “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit . . . the virtues we get by first exercising them” (Aristotle 1103a). The only way for young people to develop civic virtues is by having the opportunity to participate in civic activities.

David Norton, writing in the same philosophical vein as John Dewey, argues that more classroom education is not the solution to promoting healthy self-development among young people. Because “it is a mistake to hoard the ‘real world’ for twenty years from people whom we expect eventually to manage the world and manage themselves in it” (Norton 65-66), Norton suggests three proposals. The first proposal is for a national youth service program. Data and documentation indicate that mixing work and service is effective in reducing adolescent pathologies; it also allows young people to see alternatives, helping them make better life choices. Such a program could inspire “a new spirit of citizenship and civic obligation in America” (Norton 68), as young people learn to serve others and build their capacities.

Norton’s second proposal is for work-study or apprenticeship programs. He argues that many young college graduates are overqualified for their professions in terms of education, but would benefit greatly from alternative periods of study and work in their chosen field (Norton 74). Young people will make better choices (about vocation and other life-shaping decisions) after having such experiences (Norton 75). Practical
experiences also facilitate self-discovery and allow people to recognize their skills and talents.

Norton’s third proposal is for continuous opportunities for growth and education throughout life. There is strong evidence that mature students returning to school are superb academically; they serve as examples to younger students and become motivating factors for teachers. This is because they have had life experiences and made life choices and are now better equipped for continued self-development. In all aspects of life, combining experience with education seems to be a formula for success; the two methods complement and reinforce each other. In fact, for John Dewey, an educative experience is one in which an active mind interacts with the world to solve genuine problems.\(^2\) Dewey’s definition of education explicitly included experience.

Like Norton, Putnam also offers suggestions for reinvigorating youth engagement. He argues for civics education that addresses real issues, helping students respond to the question, “How can I participate effectively in the public life of my community?” (Putnam 405). He recognizes the value of community service, service learning,\(^3\) and volunteer programs, as well as extra-curricular activities, in engaging young people. Putnam suggests that schools be decentralized and made smaller so more students have opportunities to participate in clubs, leadership positions, sports, music, and theater. All of these activities engage young people, building social capital. Yet Putnam realizes that “our efforts to increase social participation among youth must not be limited to schooling” (Putnam 405) and challenges his reader to find innovative ways, beyond the classroom, for young people to participate.
Citizenship education properly conceived includes experiences outside of the classroom. Especially for teenagers, who are filled with energy, moving beyond classroom education to real-world experiences can make a significant difference in their current and future attitudes and behaviors: “We must channel [their] energy toward community thinking, feeling, and action. Getting students out of their seats, out of themselves, and into the community should be a litmus test of citizenship education” (Koubek 51). It is important to remember the end goal is behavior, rather than knowledge alone. In fact, “students do not need as much detailed knowledge as they need to be inspired with a ‘love of democracy.’ A heavy focus on knowledge may not get to the bigger picture,” which is actual participation (Gibson 7). According to one educator, “to rear a generation of spectators is not to educate at all” (Greene 57).

The relationship between education and experience is parallel to the difference between knowledge and action. While both are important, one should serve as the stepping-stone and corollary to the other. Education builds knowledge and shapes attitudes, thereby laying the foundation for action and experience. Properly trained and prepared with significant experiences, young people will develop both the attitudes and behaviors necessary to uphold our democracy. Without either the necessary education or experiences, the decline in civic engagement will continue, placing our long-revered practices of participation and self-government in jeopardy.

Civic education within the school environment is an important topic in which there has been renewed interest in recent years. It is a broad field, supported by many competent scholars and organizations. Most notably, the Center for Civic Education is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is “to promote an enlightened and
responsible citizenry committed to democratic principles and actively engaged in the practice of democracy.” In February 2001, the Center conducted the first survey of alumni from its “We the People” high school civics curriculum; results were reported in Chapter 1. While these findings are encouraging, the purpose of this work is not to look at civic education or specifically knowledge-enhancing programs. Rather, the focus is on opportunities for youth to actually participate in activities and programs that engage them civically, thereby developing a competence and desire for ongoing civic participation.

The policies and programs discussed in this chapter are generally organized attempts to increase participation outside of a school setting. Certainly a number of informal avenues for developing engaged citizens also may be effective. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam uses a variety of measures to gauge social capital, or civic engagement. Some of the methods include informal activities like church involvement and participating in group sports activities. While those experiences are useful in building the necessary skills and relationships for engagement, the focus here is on more formal activities or processes for youth engagement, outside of formal educational institutions. Within that framework, this chapter will describe applicable policies at several levels, then discuss specific program types and examples that are “on the ground” working to engage youth.

**Policies and Programs**

In recent years, there have been a number of proposals for a national youth policy that includes engagement. Given the level of state and local community activity, however, it is not clear that a national policy is necessary to promote youth civic
engagement. As so many initiatives and programs are already underway, advocates' efforts would be best spent in evaluating which of the existing types of youth engagement approaches are most effective.

National Policies and Proposals

We don't have a youth policy in this country, unless you say the lack of a policy is a policy. We have pieces of policy. . . We need to tie it all together- conceptually, operationally, and fiscally. . .We need a genuine youth development policy that addresses young people as three-dimensional, whole individuals and thinks strategically about how to be supportive in getting them successfully through their rather perilous voyage from childhood to full adult participation in our society and our economy (Edelman 1).

In the range of literature addressing youth policy at the national level, there is consensus on two points: first, there is no existing national youth policy and second, there should be a comprehensive policy that folds all aspects of youth into an integrated approach, including health care, education, welfare, gang, drug and violence prevention, as well as engagement. Community activists, funders, government officials, nonprofit organizations, and non-formal youth movements are all advocating a comprehensive, integrated national youth policy. They are concerned that, while there is a myriad of policies affecting young people, the federal government “lacks a coherent policy agenda for young people making the transition from childhood to adulthood” (Pittman, Irby, and Ferber 2).

Instead of considering the comprehensive development of young people, federal programs and services are scattered across various agencies that do not work together in solving problems faced by the nation’s youth. Additionally, they typically focus on youth liabilities, which is troublesome to those active in the field and has led to a call for
focusing on positive youth development as a pre-emptive strike against adolescent problems.

There is increased pressure from advocates and practitioners for policies and programs to work toward positive youth development instead of focusing on problems caused and/or faced by young people. Positive youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that help them to become socially, ethically, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast with the more common, deficit-based models that focus solely on youth problems. Positive youth development programs are active rather than reactive. Recent research studies including those by Public/Private Ventures, the Rand Corporation, Columbia University, Stanford University, and the University of Washington have shown that when young people are provided safe, structured, supervised and healthy activities in which to participate, they are less likely to become involved in high-risk, unhealthful behaviors and more likely to obtain a broad range of competencies (National Collaboration for Youth).

Within the framework of positive youth development, a comprehensive youth policy might include five developmental areas (Ferber and Pittman with Marshall 33):

1. Learning- developing positive basic and applied academic attitudes, skills, and behaviors
2. Thriving- developing physically healthy attitudes, skills, and behaviors
3. Connecting- developing positive social attitudes, skills, and behaviors
4. Working- developing positive vocational attitudes, skills, and behaviors, and
5. Leading- developing positive civic attitudes, skills, and behaviors.
While all five areas are important for the development of young people, of particular interest is the fifth area, leading, which encompasses civic engagement. Within the broad context of youth policy, this chapter is focused on policies designed, at least in part, to support young people's civic development.

The United Nations recognizes that in the United States there is "no central governmental agency on youth at the national level," though the Department of Health and Human Services plays a significant role and "other federal departments treat youth policies and programmes from sectoral perspectives" (United Nations 1). Numerous offices of the federal government, including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Justice, and Labor, do indeed support or provide programs, services, and research related to youth (see Appendix 1 for a complete list of federal agencies that provide support for youth and family programming). Such federal programs cover education, juvenile justice, health services and health insurance, child welfare and social service, workforce, labor, and rights policies. Yet few of them address the civic development of young people. Exceptions are the programs AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve, which are both administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Through Congressionally-appropriated funds, members and volunteers serve with national and community nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies to
help meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other critical areas. Originally created under the Clinton administration, the Corporation is now part of USA Freedom Corps, a White House initiative by President George W. Bush, to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility, and to help Americans answer the President's Call to Service.

Fifty thousand Americans are serving their communities 20 to 40 hours a week through AmeriCorps. Most AmeriCorps members are selected by and serve with local and national nonprofit organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, City Year, Teach for America, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America, as well as with a host of smaller community organizations, both secular and faith-based. In exchange for a year of service, AmeriCorps members earn a stipend for higher education, as well as a modest living allowance and free housing and food.

Learn and Serve America provides grants to schools, colleges, and nonprofit groups to support efforts to engage students in community service linked to academic achievement and the development of civic skills. This type of learning, called service learning, improves communities (through the students’ service projects) while preparing young people for a lifetime of responsible citizenship. In addition to providing grants, Learn and Serve America acts as a resource on service and service-learning to teachers, faculty members, schools, and community groups. (www.cns.gov)

Because of the fragmentation of youth policies at the national level, there are a number of recommendations to integrate and enhance national youth policy. Specifically, current proposals include the Younger Americans Act and the Children’s
Defense Fund's Act to Leave No Child Behind (not to be confused with President Bush's education legislation, No Child Left Behind).

Concern over lack of a national coordinated youth policy has been ongoing since at least 1979 when an early (and very similar to the current) version of the Younger Americans Act was proposed. The Younger Americans Act (as proposed in H.R. 17, 2001) has four major components. The Act would:

1) Create a national youth policy that assures all young people have access to the five tenets of "America's Promise:"
   - ongoing relationships with caring adults
   - safe places with structured activities
   - access to services that promote healthy lifestyles, including those improving physical and mental health
   - opportunities to acquire marketable skills and competencies and
   - opportunities for community service and civic participation

2) Provide for the coordination of the national youth policy by creating:
   - an Office on National Youth Policy within the executive branch, headed by a director appointed by the President
   - a Council on National Youth Policy composed of 12 non-governmental members (one-third of whom will be youth under age 21) appointed by the President

3) Provide grants for state and community programs administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services

4) Provide funds for training, research, dissemination of information, and evaluation of state activities implemented under the act.

The Younger Americans Act was introduced in 2001 with bipartisan support (including 65 Democrat and 15 Republican cosponsors). Two years later, however, it had still not passed, so proponents incorporated it into a new proposal.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) drafted an omnibus "Act to Leave no Child Behind," which was unveiled in February 2003 by Senator Christopher Dodd, D-CT, and Representative George Miller, D-CA. This proposal was at least partially prompted by
the lack of action on the Younger Americans Act (YAA), so while it is broader, it includes the provisions of the proposed YAA under one of its twelve titles. The bill is quite comprehensive, encompassing services for young children, youth, and families.

While the Act has not been passed in its entirety, several provisions from the twelve titles have been adopted individually or as parts of other legislation. For example, new laws have incorporated education reforms, tax assistance, food stamp improvements, help for abused/neglected children, and juvenile justice reforms from the Act (*Act to Leave No Child Behind Fact Sheets*). No legislation has been passed, however, that focuses on civic engagement, community service, or leadership development for young people. This is due, at least partially, to the fact that the need for and the effectiveness of such programs has not been demonstrated, as discussed later in the chapter.

In addition to these two specific proposals for legislation, a number of activists and researchers in the field have developed recommendations, on a more theoretical level, for a national youth policy. Although there are several sets of recommendations from both activist groups and academic researchers, the recommendations are remarkably similar. This is significant because it indicates that even though the groups have not worked together to develop one set of recommendations, there is general consensus on what should be done.

A full description of recommendations for a national youth policy is included in Appendix 2. The proposals come from the Commonwealth Youth Charter in Great Britain (Pittman, Irby, and Ferber 11); a coalition of worldwide organizations involved in non-formal youth education (World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations, World Young Women’s Christian Association, World Organization of the Scout
Movement, et al 8); and the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a nonprofit that includes numerous members6 (National Collaboration for Youth). Although they differ on specifics, they share several common themes. In their recommendations to the federal government, all three groups call for 1) a nationally coordinated youth policy, with an action plan; 2) a lead agency to carry out the policy; 3) the input and participation of diverse young people in designing and carrying out the policy, including the establishment of a national youth advisory council; 4) sufficient funding to effectively implement the policy and support community youth initiatives; and 5) professional development training for youth practitioners and funding for research to identify effective programs.

The high rate of consistency among the recommendations by different groups indicates there is significant agreement about what will work best. However, all of the recommendations rely on the basic assumptions that a national youth policy would be effective in, and is necessary to, developing civic engagement among young people. These assumptions have not been proven. It appears that the passion and energy around the idea of engaging young people prompted a number of recommendations and proposals without first determining the most suitable methods and institutions for developing and supporting civic engagement.

The assumption that a national youth policy is an effective way to promote youth civic engagement is untested. Great Britain has implemented a national youth policy, but does not yet have any information about its results, outcomes or effectiveness. Within the field in the United States, there is a lack of quality, consistent research and data on the effectiveness of youth engagement programs. Researchers and writers in the field
recognize this lack, and are calling for experimental, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal research, including evaluations "to improve program design and implementation, to create accountability, and to assess outcomes and impacts" (Eccles and Gootman 16; see also Walker 2). We need to know what strategies or approaches work best to develop positive citizenship and what the impacts of those strategies are, especially over time (Zaff and Michelsen 20). Along with measuring program outcomes, there is a need for descriptive studies of settings and processes so that successful programs can be duplicated. Without this kind of information, it is extremely difficult to determine whether a national youth policy is an effective strategy to achieve civic engagement.

The second assumption, that action by the federal government in the form of a national youth policy is necessary to developing and promoting civic engagement for young people, is not sustained. As discussed later in this chapter, numerous youth engagement programs, initiatives and activities are taking place in states and communities across the nation, without the existence of a national youth policy. Some are due entirely to private or individual initiative, while others are supported by national or regional coalitions. The fact that youth engagement activities do take place without a national youth policy is demonstrated by the movement for integrated state youth policies as well as the variety of local "on the ground" activities and programs taking place in communities across the country. Both the state and local efforts are discussed below.
State and Local Policies and Programs

*Though bold-sounding policies regarding children are being floated at the national level, when it comes to who will really make the difference, look instead to the state legislators, city councilors, county commissioners and other less-glamorous local leaders.*

(Sally Cole, National Association of Child Advocates, quoted in Ferber and Pittman 2)

Despite the lack of a national youth policy, states are starting to recognize the importance of a coordinated and integrated youth policy. See Appendix 3 for a summary of state efforts in this area, compiled by the Forum for Youth Investment (www.forumforyouthinvestment.org). Some states are being supported in their efforts by national organizations that have developed initiatives promoting state youth policy; national organizations involved in these efforts include the National Governors Association, the National Crime Prevention Council, and the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Through networks of research and support, these partnerships are moving toward their goals of comprehensive and integrated youth policies at the state level.

For example, Iowa created the statewide Collaboration for Youth Development, consisting of members of more than 40 state agencies, community organizations, research institutions and statewide non-governmental organizations. They are working together to define common objectives and outcomes for youth-related services, align state program policies and funding, and involve youth in state and local planning. Similarly, Massachusetts created an Office of Youth Development in 1999 to support and establish effective youth development programs at the state and local levels. They also formed a statewide Youth Development Advisory Council and formally endorsed a draft Statewide
Policy on Youth. These two states are taking an active approach using positive youth
development strategies. Other states—such as California and Oregon with their statewide
approaches to youth crime prevention (see Appendix 3)—are making strides in
integrating and coordinating their youth policies but are focusing on problems and the
deficit model of youth policy instead of positive youth development, which is where
programs for civic engagement come into play (Ferber and Pittman).

In addition to these efforts toward statewide integrated youth policies, the
movement for service learning has been growing in states across the country. In just the
last few years, a number of states have altered or created policies to promote service
learning in public school systems. Currently, 27 states mention service learning in state-
level policies: 8 apply it toward graduation, 11 encourage it, 6 include it in education
standards and 6 have appropriated funding for it (Zaff and Michelsen 17).

As at the national level, researchers and advocates are calling on states to develop
integrated youth policies, and they provide recommendations for doing so. The Forum
for Youth Investment identifies nine “critical tasks” states should undertake to develop a
comprehensive youth policy (Ferber and Pittman with Marshall 17):

1. Vision: framing the issue- states should define and communicate common
   premises, principles, and priorities that address outcomes, inputs, settings,
   timeframes, actors, and target populations.

2. Building cross-cutting coordinating bodies- states should work to put structures in
   place to look across systems, organizations, and programs with a youth
development lens.

3. Providing proof: evidence, data, outcomes, and indicators- states should collect,
   analyze, and disseminate data in ways that promote a shared sense of
   accountability.
4. Youth and community involvement- states should involve youth and community members in shaping and advancing their efforts.

5. Marketing, messages, and communications- states should work to overcome the generally negative views of young people by advancing clear messages and communications to promote a more accurate, positive view of young people and the value of collaborative efforts to support youth development.

6. Capacity building: demonstration projects and training and technical assistance- states should build the capacity of people, programs and places to promote youth development.

7. Model policies and initiatives- states should develop cross-cutting multi-system initiatives and processes to demonstrate how various departments, agencies and organizations can and should work together.

8. Making the case to influential funders to increase resources- state policy makers and officials should inform influential funders and leverage foundation, corporate and federal dollars to support young people.

9. Technology- states can use databases and the Internet as powerful tools for collecting, synthesizing, and disseminating information.

The momentum for state youth policies is growing as states increasingly are working together and learning from each other. They are certainly not waiting for the enactment of a national youth policy. As time progresses and more states develop comprehensive policies, it may be possible to identify the more effective approaches. It will be especially interesting to see outcomes related to civic engagement in those states that are emphasizing the positive youth development approach instead of the traditional youth deficit model. Clearly, activities are occurring at the state level independent of national policy; over time we should be able to measure their effectiveness.

At the local level, discourse and action around youth engagement are less focused on public policy; the emphasis rests on the programmatic level and actions of community groups and private initiatives. The National League of Cities (NLC), however, has begun
to take a serious interest in promoting the development of young people through actions of municipalities. The NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education, and Families is advocating youth participation by sponsoring publications and regional meetings, along with facilitating a network of local agencies that are (or want to become) engaged in promoting young people’s participation in public processes of governance. The NLC is calling on those agencies already engaged in such efforts to train and motivate others through the network. NLC’s network is too new to make any judgment calls about its effectiveness.

The NLC’s approach does not specifically call for municipalities to enact youth development policies. Instead, it suggests several activities local governments can organize to allow the youth in their community to participate. Such options include:

- Promoting diverse forms of youth service;
- Hosting a youth summit or similar forum for discussions involving young people;
- Engaging young people in community mapping efforts [identifying resources and needs]; and
- Establishing a youth council or appointing young people to local boards and commissions.

According to NLC, the above list is not meant to be mutually exclusive or exhaustive, but instead to point to some places to start, for “once the ball is rolling, young people themselves will help to define and refine the vision for youth participation and involvement in local government—which is, after all, exactly the point” (National League of Cities).
Clearly, the focus for the NLC is on development of young people’s civic opportunities and capacities, not the whole comprehensive approach to youth development that includes health, justice, etc. This appears to be the norm at the local level. In communities across the country, there are hundreds of programs, activities, and initiatives that strive to develop civic opportunities and capacities for young people.

Youth Engagement Program Types and Examples

Youth programs that promote or address civic engagement can be divided into six categories: 1) Youth Leadership Development; 2) Role-Playing or Modeling Programs; 3) Youth Representation; 4) Youth Advisory Councils; 5) Issue-Based Youth Activism or Advocacy; and 6) National Networks or Clearinghouses. Some repetition and overlap occur across the first five categories, which forces generalizations, but the categories are useful for analysis and comparison of programs. The sixth category, national networks or clearinghouses, consists of initiatives that promote and provide resources for youth civic engagement without necessarily sponsoring or administering programs for young people. Examples in each category are presented below; these examples are by no means exhaustive, but they are meant to be representative and established programs of the categorized type, about which information is available.

Youth Leadership Development.

Leadership development programs for youth strive to do just that—develop leadership skills (such as awareness of social and political issues, motivation and capacity to take action on them, and ability to work cooperatively) and provide opportunities for exercising them. While leadership development can and does occur through a variety of activities and experiences, several programs specifically focus on it. They include the
Prudential Youth Leadership Institute, various programs of the National Youth Leadership Council, the Youth Leadership Institute of San Francisco, and youth leadership programs sponsored by local chambers of commerce.

The mission of the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute (PYLI) is to provide youth with the encouragement, peer networks and leadership skills necessary for them to make meaningful contributions to their communities and begin a life-long journey of leadership and service. PYLI is a training program designed to teach leadership and community service skills to high school-age students. The program was created by the Prudential Insurance Company of America, in partnership with Youth Service America and the Center for Creative Leadership. It is administered by The Points of Light Foundation. Youth service professionals who have been certified as trainers of the Institute are currently conducting the Institute in over 40 states. There are three major program elements to PYLI. They include teaching the leadership curriculum, planning and implementing a community service project and conducting a graduation ceremony. Participants are taught leadership skills - such as goal setting, team building, project planning and decision making - while emphasizing the importance and means of applying these skills to community service endeavors. The purpose of the service project is to give Institute participants an opportunity to utilize what they have learned from the training curriculum, gain confidence in their abilities to create, develop, and implement a service project, and act upon their social concerns expressed during the training (www.pyli.org).

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to build vital, just communities with young people through service learning. NYLC is at the forefront of efforts to reform education and guide
youth-oriented public policy. Two of their programs specifically focus on youth leadership development. The National Youth Leadership Camp is an eight-day program that motivates and trains participants - young people in grades 9 through 12 - for assuming leadership roles in their communities, in order to address social issues and community development. The curriculum emphasizes personal development through a series of physical, social, and artistic challenges. It also offers training in follow up strategies for service and leadership back home such as cross-age tutoring of younger students, care for elders, and environmental improvement projects. The Youth Project Team (YPT) consists of young people from the Twin Cities' metro area (NYLC is based in Minnesota) who “are servant leaders dedicated to promoting youth voice, service-learning, and youth-adult partnerships.” The team members provide opportunities for young people to connect to schools and communities (www.nylc.org).

The Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) is based in San Francisco and primarily serves California residents. YLI “operates in partnership with young people and the systems that sustain them to build communities that value, honor and support youth” (www.yli.org). YLI sponsors various events, training opportunities and programs to provide youth with opportunities for developing leadership skills in the areas of destructive behaviors prevention, youth philanthropy, and youth governance and policy (www.yli.org).

In a number of communities, business chambers of commerce conduct youth leadership programs. Among them are “Leadership Brevard” in Florida and “Leadership Las Vegas” in Nevada. The programs usually mirror the chambers’ adult leadership training programs, in which participants travel around the community to learn about its
history and current challenges. Participants often work together on a group project or assignment related to a community issue. For the youth leadership programs, participants are usually nominated by their high schools.

Role-Playing or Modeling Programs.

Role-playing or modeling programs simulate political or government activities. They allow young people to participate in mock exercises of governance, debate, policy development, and decision-making. Examples include the “We the People” program sponsored by the Center for Civic Education, the Girls and Boys State programs, and the Capitol Focus program.

The primary goal of We the People is to promote civic competence and responsibility among the nation’s elementary and secondary students. The curriculum, used in school classrooms, enhances students’ understanding of the institutions of American constitutional democracy and their contemporary relevance. The culminating activity is a simulated Congressional hearing in which students testify before a panel of judges. Students demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles and have opportunities to evaluate, take, and defend positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues (www.civiced.org).

Girls and Boys State are “personal citizenship experiences” sponsored by the American Legion for high-school-age boys and American Legion Auxiliary for high-school-age girls. They are participatory programs where each participant becomes a part of the operation of his or her local, county and state governments. Students run for and elect each other to the various offices of city, county and state governments. Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law enforcement presentations,
Capitol Focus is a program of the California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Students from throughout California come to the state capital for four days of meetings with legislators, executive branch officials, lobbying organizations, the media, and representatives of the justice system. Students examine, discuss, and then cast their votes on current public policy issues actually under consideration by lawmakers. They learn how those issues affect their lives, while practicing the analytical skills necessary to learn both sides of a topic. Participants develop an understanding of public policies, public speaking and writing skills, and get training in how to effect social change in their schools, neighborhoods, and local/state government (www.californiacenter.org).

Youth Representation.

Youth representation is a fairly recent movement to institute youth positions on various governing boards, especially those of educational institutions, youth-serving organizations, and non-profits. It grew out of the idea that young people ought to participate in discussions and decisions affecting their lives. There is a broad range of youth representation on various boards—from several youth members with full voting privileges to one token young person with observer status. Some of the more progressive examples are the National 4-H Council, the Turner Youth Development Initiative, and the Hampton Youth Commission.

National 4-H Council is the national, private sector non-profit partner of 4-H and the Cooperative Extension System. National 4-H Council partners with 4-H at all
levels—national, state and local—providing training and support, curriculum
development, fostering innovative programming, and facilitating meetings and
connections within the 4-H partnership. The council is governed by its own Board of
Trustees, made up of youth, representatives from 4-H/Extension/land-grant universities,
corporate executives and other private citizens from a wide array of backgrounds. Youth
occupy ten positions, with full voting privileges, of the approximately 30-member Board.
Youth members began to serve on the Board after activist 4-H students successfully
fought for representation (www.fourhcouncil.edu).

The Turner Youth Development Initiative, funded by the Turner Foundation, was
formed to “connect kids to the community in Bozeman, Montana, by engaging them in
decision-making and helping them reach their full potential to become active citizens”
(Zeldin et al 55). The work of the initiative is accomplished through a variety of task
forces consisting of youth and adults making decisions and working together to provide
healthy programs and activities for young people, including after-school activities, job
shadowing, media experience and volunteer opportunities (Zeldin et al 55).

The Hampton Youth Commission was created when young people recommended
they be included in the city planning processes in Hampton, Virginia. Today, not only do
young people serve on and have decision-making power on the city planning
commission, but youth members also have been added to six standing commissions in the
city, including the Neighborhood Commission and the Arts Commission. High school
principals in the area then followed the example of the city and now include young
people as advisors in their decision-making processes (Zeldin et al 37).
Youth Advisory Councils.

Youth advisory councils (YACs) are forums for public participation by youth—the younger version of citizens advisory councils. They consist of a group of young people who serve together to guide the work of a non-profit, government, or other organization at their request. Youth advisory councils differ from youth representation in that YACs are made up entirely of young people; in youth representation, young people fill a certain number of designated positions on an adult governing board. Youth advisory councils are not the actual governing boards of the organization, but they make recommendations and often help develop policy. Examples include the National Youth Advisory Council (part of Youth Service America), the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation Youth Advisory Board in Missouri, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority Youth Advisory Council in Las Vegas.

The National Youth Advisory Council was founded by Youth Service America (YSA), whose mission is to strengthen the effectiveness, sustainability, and scale of the youth service and service-learning field. This is based on the belief that a strong youth service movement will create healthy communities, and foster citizenship, knowledge, and the personal development of young people. The National Youth Advisory Council is part of YSA’s Youth Voice program, a national campaign to increase the quantity and quality of opportunities for young people to serve as decision-makers in organizations and communities. Their goal is to mobilize and motivate youth volunteers to further their goals and impact by connecting their involvement in community service with the public-policy making process and other forms of civic engagement. The National Youth
Advisory Council is made up of 25 young people, ages 14-22, from eighteen different states (www.ysa.org).

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is a unique forum to empower young people as philanthropists and promote opportunities for youth leadership. Student members discuss community needs and create opportunities for youth in the metropolitan Kansas City area. They take action by allocating thousands of dollars (from the Foundation) to community groups that strive to enrich the lives of urban youth. The idea is to involve young people in solving problems that affect their peers and to encourage other youth to give back to their community. In addition to allocating grant funds to youth causes in the community, the YAB advises adult staff to help improve the Foundation’s youth programs. The young people also participate in youth development activities. YAB is comprised of students, ages 14 to 19, representing more than 20 urban, suburban, rural, public and private high schools in the area (www.emkf.org).

The Southern Nevada Water Authority is a not-for-profit, quasi-municipal agency governing water resources on a regional level in the Las Vegas area. The authority launched its Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in 1999 to open a two-way dialogue with young people about water-related issues in a community where water is a critically scarce resource. The YAC consists of 25-30 students representing local public and private high schools. They serve for approximately one year, during which time they participate in “H2O University” to learn about local and regional water issues. With that knowledge, students then select a specific water issue or area of focus (for example, reducing urban runoff or promoting conservation in outdoor landscaping). Based on their selected topic, the YAC then plans and implements a community project and/or develops policy
recommendations for the SNWA Board of Directors, composed of regional elected officials. The student members also participate in leadership development activities (www.snwa.com).

Issue-Based Youth Activism or Advocacy.

This category is broad and diverse, consisting of youth-led activism and advocacy efforts across the country. These activities include youth taking action on everything from civil rights issues to health and environmental concerns, with targeted policy changes from the school grounds to the federal level, and everything in between.

Several examples will illustrate the nature and scope of these activities. Middle school students in Dallas, Texas, documented the number of liquor stores near inner-city schools (although there were none to be found near the suburban schools). Students lobbied the state legislature, resulting in the state law being changed to allow the local zoning board to reduce the number of liquor stores in the downtown area. An Oakland, California, student group that calls itself Teens on Target lobbies for stricter gun control. They succeeded in convincing the city council to require gun buyers to obtain trigger locks, and they also persuaded the *Oakland Tribune* to stop running ads for guns in their newspapers. In Leesburg, Virginia, skaters and skateboarders were banned from using sidewalks and parking lots until teenage boys made their case to the city council, asking for a place to skate. The boys were then able to serve on a parks committee and work with architects to design a skating facility. A very similar sequence of events took place in Rockville, Maryland.¹²

Scenarios like this are probably repeated in numerous towns and cities across the country. Some receive significant attention, while others go virtually unnoticed. Though
the breadth of activism addresses a variety of issues, they all share the fact that young 
people are stepping up to fight for issues important to them.

National Networks and Clearinghouses.

National networks and clearinghouses serve an important role even though, in 
most cases, they do not directly interact with young people. Instead, they provide 
resources, tools, training, information, and networks to assist organizations, young 
people, and adult youth advocates in their quest to promote youth engagement.

The Activism 2000 Project is a self-described “democracy dropout prevention 
clearinghouse encouraging maximum youth participation” (www.youthactivism.com).
The Activism 2000 Project was founded in 1992, by a long-time adult advocate of youth 
engagement, as a private non-partisan clearinghouse to encourage young people to speak 
up and pursue lasting solutions to problems about which they care deeply. The project, 
based in the nation’s capital, has committed itself to five activities:

• Provide free advice to youths so they can transform their ideas into practical 
  proposals and develop strategies for gaining the attention of the powers-that-be 
  and news media.

• Train parents, mentors and other caring adults on how they can coach tweens 
  (pre-teens) and teens to exercise leadership and be effective advocates now.

• Promote youth infusion on advisory councils, citizen task forces, school boards, 
  adult coalitions, etc., and assist public and non-profit agencies on partnering with 
  youths from diverse backgrounds.

• Convince community and government leaders that young people must no longer 
  be shut out of the decision-making process and urge them to take seriously the 
  ideas and solutions offered by the next generation.

• Act as a network, connecting like-minded individuals who are tackling similar 
  issues and providing them with information about people, organizations, and 
  projects in America or abroad (www.youthactivism.com).
As part of the Pew Charitable Trusts’ Youth Engagement Initiative, Pew funded the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). CIRCLE promotes research on civic engagement by Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, its projects have practical implications for those who work to increase young people’s engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs (www.civicyouth.org).

AtTheTable.org, a project of the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, is designed to provide resources and information about how to involve young people in decision-making. At the Table was formed to facilitate a coordinated, sustainable national youth participation movement. Working with partners across the country, the project seeks to educate and inform about the value of youth participation as well as to prepare youth and adults to work together to create positive change.

AtTheTable.org aims to:

- Connect individuals, organizations and communities to the resources they need to successfully involve youth in decision-making.
- Introduce likeminded youth and adults to each other so they can swap stories and share best practices.
- Gather information about where and how youth are engaged in decisions that affect them and share their stories for the benefit of all (www.atthetable.org).

Youth on Board is a grassroots nonprofit organization that prepares youth to be leaders in their communities and works to strengthen relationships between youth and adults by providing publications, customized workshops, and technical assistance. Youth
on Board’s mission is to “revolutionize the role of young people in society by changing attitudes and strengthening relationships among youth, and between young people and adults; preparing young people to be leaders and decision makers in all aspects of their lives; and ensuring that policies, practices and laws reflect young people’s role as full and valued members of their communities” (www.youthonboard.org).

There are challenges to breaking youth engagement programs into categories. Various program types may suit different young people at different times and thus they all can be valid and useful. Some programs are so different from others that evaluating them is like comparing apples to oranges. With the exception of role-playing and modeling programs, what these community programs have in common is their real-world focus, providing actual experiences for youth to participate. While some education is certainly included, the emphasis is on action and experiential activities.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role of education contrasted with experience in engaging young people, then described actual and proposed policies related to youth engagement at the national, state and local level. In many communities, programs to engage young people are taking place without waiting for public policy, sponsored by non-profits and community organizations. This chapter identified six categories of youth engagement programs: youth leadership development, role-playing or modeling programs, youth representation, youth advisory councils, issue-based youth activism or advocacy, and national networks or clearinghouses. The argument can be made that such programs are valuable because they engage young people in real-life issues, providing
opportunities for them to participate in community problem solving and policy
development. By allowing them to address a real issue at the local level and take action
on it, youth engagement practitioners assume such community programs are effective
because they help young people realize that their input is valued and their actions really
can make a difference.

This assumption has not been well researched in terms of long-term participant
impacts, however. There is currently very little data attempting to measure the
effectiveness of a community action-based approach in engaging young people politically
and civically. Longitudinal data that track program participants over time and across
election cycles can serve as a foundation to show the long-term effects of community-
based programs. It follows that if evaluation processes indicate a certain policy or
program is effective in raising levels of voting or other engagement criteria (such as civic
participation) over time, that would provide valuable direction for future programs. Good
research is necessary to identify effective community approaches that should be
supported and/or duplicated in order to engage young people in the civic and political life
of our nation.
For discussions of the importance of education to democracy and the development of citizens, see John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and Two Treatises of Government; Rousseau’s *Emile* and Second Discourse; Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*; and Dewey, *Democracy and Education.*

^1 See Dewey, *Experience and Education.*

^2 Service learning is usually defined as a fusion of formal education and community service, in which service projects are directly linked to a classroom course of study. Though many community-based engagement programs incorporate service, most service-learning advocates do not consider such activities service-learning unless they are coordinated through a formal education institution.


^6 The numbers do not add to 27 because some state policies include more than one of those applications.

^7 These categories were developed by the author. See Cutler 2002 and Gibson 2001 for two other possible ways to categorize youth engagement programs.
See Appendix 4 for a list of web sites of organizations and programs involved in youth engagement efforts.

This description of leadership skills comes from the National Youth Leadership Council, www.nylc.org.

We the People is the civic education program for which evaluation data was presented in Chapter 1.

All examples in this paragraph were reported by www.youthactivism.com.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a need was identified for research on the effectiveness of community-based youth engagement programs. One such program is the Southern Nevada Water Authority’s Youth Advisory Council in Las Vegas, which involves young people in local water and environmental issues through a community problem solving approach. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) has undertaken a multi-year research project, gathering longitudinal data from its Youth Advisory Council participants, to determine the long-term impacts of the program on their civic and political behaviors and attitudes. This chapter reports on preliminary research that suggests the program can be an effective tool in engaging young people.

Interestingly, the SNWA did not embark on the Youth Advisory Council venture with civic engagement as a goal. Instead, the Youth Advisory Council grew out of SNWA’s commitment to public participation and the agency’s history of involving citizens in the policy-making process. Upon realizing that young people are significant stakeholders in decisions related to water management, SNWA made a commitment to include youth in its public participation efforts. Given this context, this chapter provides
a review of public participation literature before describing the Youth Advisory Council research and findings relative to civic engagement.

Public Participation

In the last several decades, there has been a movement in the United States and other democracies to deliberately involve the public in making decisions and developing public policy, with the idea that citizens should have a say in decisions that affect their lives. This is often called public participation, community consultation, or public/stakeholder involvement. While the terms are usually used interchangeably, some scholars and practitioners choose their language carefully, believing that consultation includes “education, information sharing, and negotiation with the goal of better decision making by the organization that is consulting the public,” while participation actually brings the public into the decision making process in “shared decision making or comanagement” (Sinclair 424). The underlying idea behind public participation is that in a democratic society, the legitimacy of government actions and institutions depends on the participation and input of citizens.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is a professional organization with members including practitioners, independent facilitators, government agencies, and others involved in promoting citizen participation in the processes of governance. IAP2 provides a number of guidelines and resources for its members, including the “IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation” for use in the development and implementation of public participation processes. The purpose of these core values is to
help make better decisions that reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities. IAP2’s Core Values are listed below (www.iap2.org).

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.

2. Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.

3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.

4. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.

5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.

6. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

7. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

While there is broad agreement that public participation is the “right thing to do” in a democracy, it still raises a number of issues and questions that practitioners and scholars in the field, including IAP2, are continually working to address. First, the most fundamental question is whether the public should have a role at all or if decisions are best made by experts, which becomes a discussion of democracy versus technocracy and the benefits of each. Second, it is crucial to distinguish between public participation processes that are truly genuine and those that are a façade. Third, calling a process genuine has much to do with managing expectations and defining a role for the public, as there can be a spectrum with varying levels of public participation. Fourth, within a public participation process, success can hinge on effective facilitation. Fifth, perhaps one of the greatest challenges of public participation is dealing with implementation
issues, ensuring the public’s input is actually considered and used, including evaluating the process. Each of these five questions or issues related to public participation is discussed below.

Role for the Public

Although the value of public participation is established enough to warrant social and sometimes legal pressure to involve citizens, some scholars are concerned that taking decision-making responsibility away from the experts will have negative consequences. DeSario and Langton recommend that a “metapolicy” be developed to decide how to make policy. The purpose of the metapolicy is to reconcile the growing tension between citizen participation and scientific expertise, and better define their respective roles. The authors argue that historically, science and democracy have supported each other; but in the current information age, there have been growing incompatibility and frustration between experts and citizen participation in public decision-making. To develop this metapolicy, the following three questions must be answered (DeSario and Langton 211).

1. What is the proper interaction between technocracy and democracy?

2. What types of policy considerations or issues are most appropriate to citizen versus technocratic decision making?

3. What are some of the procedures and methods that facilitate citizen versus expert participation?

DeSario and Langton do not provide solutions, but suggest that working to answer these questions will help develop a metapolicy to define appropriate roles and responsibilities for both citizens and experts to participate.

Another author presents an interesting perspective on the idea of citizen participation in the processes of governance. Rather than accepting public participation
as a positive step in the ongoing quest for improved policymaking, Pierre presents the
dilemmas and unintended consequences that may occur as a result of public intervention
in policy development and decision-making. He writes under the assumption that the
purpose of citizen input is to “make public policy more directly accessible and responsive
to citizens’ preferences and also to provide policymakers with a wider variety of ideas,
perspectives and suggestions” (Pierre 137). Pierre argues that four consequences (which
he believes to be negative) can occur as a result of this move toward public participation.
First, policymakers may rely less on the expertise of the civil service, who are trained and
paid to evaluate policy alternatives. Second, citizen participation challenges the role of
political parties as policy experts (although, according to Pierre, this is a role parties have
played less in the U.S. than in other democracies). Third, public input can undercut the
traditional relationships that develop among the civil service, legislators, and interest
groups. Fourth, a more systemic concern for Pierre is that increased citizen participation
in the processes of governance will ultimately undermine the representative system of
government, as citizens take over through “direct democracy” and no longer rely on
elected representatives. These four outcomes may indeed be the results of increased
public participation, but whether they are negative, undesired consequences is a matter of
perspective.

A compromise approach, in which experts masked as “assistants” support the
public, is provided in Skjei’s 1973 work, Information for Collective Action. Although the
book is dated, the argument is enduring, as it echoes the concerns of Alexander Hamilton
and Walter Lippmann (discussed in Chapter 2) about the fitness of the general public to
govern. Skjei believes “the self interest of participants in a public decision system will
not lead them to produce the information a society needs to control collective action” (Skjei 161), which creates challenges for public participation. Given this position, he proposes two approaches to help provide participants with the information they need to participate in making effective public decisions. His first approach is to have the public rely on a professional planning agency, whose role would vary depending on the situation and the complexity of information required. Skjei’s second suggested approach is to subsidize information development by providing “trained personnel proficient in the production of information” (Skjei 166) to assist citizen participants in gathering and digesting the information needed to make good decisions. Certainly there is validity to the concern that citizens do not have all the information and tools that experts have when faced with complex policy decisions. Compromise approaches, partnerships and sharing of information can serve as tools to assist citizens in the policy process. Even though citizens may not have all the expertise, the basic assumption of democracy is that the public can be trusted to make good decisions; democracy rests on the idea that participation by the public is beneficial.

One of the benefits of public participation arises from citizens simply talking together about issues. Matthews and McAfee argue that public deliberation is essential for “democratic politics to operate as it should.” In order for people to take action in a democracy, they must first decide how to act. Public deliberation, or community-wide discussion of issues, allows people to share and formulate opinions, making each other aware of different views about costs and consequences. This enables them to find courses of action that are consistent with what is valued by the community as a whole. By engaging in public deliberation to make decisions, Matthews and McAfee claim that
individuals become less self-interested and more self-confident. Based on anecdotal stories rather than empirical evidence, they believe a sense of community is created, civic responsibility increases, and participants and the community gain broader knowledge. Additionally, personal opinion is transformed into “mature judgment,” which takes into account multiple choices, trade-offs, and pros and cons. Through public deliberation, individuals become active citizens and together make good community decisions. By talking and working together, citizens’ capacity to make good decisions is enhanced.

Another author, Albert Weale, is frank in acknowledging the challenges and frustrations of public participation in policymaking. Nevertheless, he argues for greater public participation by presenting evidence in six categories (Weale 40-42). Public participation is useful in: 1) Avoiding unnecessary confrontation and creating the conditions for consensus; 2) Rectifying an imbalance of political influence; 3) Improving the technical quality of decisions (diverse public participation can be as or more effective than expertise); 4) Identifying competing perspectives on issues, particularly in respect of their moral dimensions; 5) Addressing the publicity condition in a democracy; and 6) Increasing legitimacy.

Ultimately, Weale suggests that some public decisions so profoundly affect citizens’ lives that they would not be legitimate without public involvement. Therefore, he suggests several methods for improving public participation, describing how the public can be involved in focus groups, citizen juries, consensus conferences, community forums, and panels. He moves beyond the traditional forms to suggest that even public opinion polls can be considered a form of public participation.
Facade vs. Genuine

Not all public participation advocates would agree that polls are genuine public participation processes. Legitimacy of public participation has to do with both the intent and format of the process. While many local government agencies involve the public out of a sense of obligation to the community and “good government” practices, increasingly more public participation is mandated by law; this is especially true in the realm of environmental issues. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has developed structured guidelines and requirements for public involvement. Although the intent may be well-meaning, the concern is that, as more public participation is mandated, less will arise out of a genuine desire for public input. This can create a cycle of cynicism in which the public sees participation processes as “window dressing” or publicity stunts and therefore chooses not to participate. The agency then thinks the public does not want to provide input and hence facilitates even fewer opportunities for them to participate. In order for public participation to be successful and effective, the public must accept it as genuine. This does not mean there is one formula for a legitimate process; on the contrary, there are a number of ways for the public to participate, all within the framework of a genuine process.

Spectrum of Public Roles/Managing Expectations

The types of opportunities for public participation can vary significantly, from providing information to empowering the public to actually make the decision. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) uses a spectrum to describe the range of participation levels. The spectrum, shown in Figure 10, moves from left to right
in describing increasingly significant opportunities for public impact on the policy-making process. In Figure 10 below, P2 stands for public participation.

![Figure 10: Public Participation Spectrum](see www.iap2.org)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide the public with balanced and objective information.</td>
<td>Obtain public feedback.</td>
<td>Work directly with the public to understand and consider their concerns.</td>
<td>Partner with the public in each aspect of decision making.</td>
<td>Place final decision making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise to the Public</td>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will ensure your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the outcome.</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your ideas to the maximum extent.</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example Tools</td>
<td>fact sheets, web sites, open houses</td>
<td>workshops, deliberative polling</td>
<td>citizen advisory committees, consensus building</td>
<td>Citizen juries, ballots, delegated decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While empowerment represents the greatest degree of public involvement, it may not be realistic in all situations. The level of public participation can vary depending on the complexity of the issue and the number of stakeholders involved. Most researchers
and practitioners in the field of public involvement agree that, while empowerment may
be ideal, any level of public participation can be legitimate and genuine so long as the
public is not deceived about its role. The “promise to the public” shown in the spectrum
above is designed to help agencies and facilitators manage expectations to avoid
promising the public more input than is possible and thereby prevent the cynicism that
results from a “fake” process.

Activist Adam Fletcher uses a “Ladder of Community Participation” as a way to
categorize the levels at which traditionally marginalized community members can and
should be empowered. The bottom of the ladder starts with community members serving
as decoration or being tokenized. Progressing up the ladder, their participation becomes
more extensive and genuine until they are initiating and leading the action (Fletcher).

The United States is not typically considered the worldwide leader in public
participation. In many ways, Canada’s public participation processes are more
established and advanced than those in the United States, so they provide interesting
lessons and perspectives for both study and practice. Blakeney, a politician, and Borins,
an academic, write about the challenges of public administration in Canada and provide
insight into the processes and difficulties of involving the public in policy-making. When
engaging the public, the government can have a number of outcomes in mind. The
public’s role can range from simply presenting ideas to engaging in dialogue with
policymakers to drafting legislation to actually being empowered to make a decision.
Like IAP2, Blakeney and Borins recognize that it is imperative for the government to
define the public’s role in the beginning, to manage the public’s expectations. The
authors suggest that on particularly controversial issues, policymakers have only two
options: listen to all the opposing stakeholders and then make the decision without their input, or design a process for the opposing groups to reach a compromise among themselves. They caution that issues are complex (a nuanced shade of gray rather than black and white), so it is unrealistic to expect the public to give an "oversimplified black-or-white answer" (Blakeney and Borins 197).

Another Canadian author, Sinclair, argues that the reason Canada has not made progress toward sustainable development policies is that there has not been "broad, effective, and early public consultation" that results in innovative decisions promoting sustainable development. The specific challenge Sinclair identifies in Canada is interesting and insightful: although public consultation is a standard practice in government decision-making, it is primarily occurring at the operational or implementation level. To be more effective and reach the Canadian goal of sustainable development, Sinclair suggests the public must be consulted much earlier in the process, at the normative stage in which policies or plans are being developed and where decisions are made about the objectives and goals regarding what ought to be done. Even when a particular role is defined and the public's expectations are managed, effective facilitation is necessary to maximize the value of public participation processes (Sinclair 440).

Facilitating Effective Public Participation

Within the context of municipal planning processes, John Forester provides tools and techniques for creating processes in which the public can deliberate and make decisions together. His audience is the public planning practitioner, to whom he assigns significant responsibility for facilitating public learning and public action, through lenses of both facts and values. Despite recognizing the very difficult role of facilitating
collaborative problem solving among the conflicting and divergent views of politicians, residents, activists, businesses, interest groups, etc., Forester argues for a model of consensus building. Through a number of case studies and interviews, he dramatizes the role of the practitioner in working through issues of both facts and values to reach consensus on highly charged issues. Specifically interesting is his treatment of the issue of power in this context. He is realistic in recognizing the pervasive influence of power in public decision-making processes and the difficulties that unequal power structures pose for consensus building. Nonetheless, he presents a lofty challenge to practitioners: “Let us stop rediscovering that power corrupts, and let’s start figuring out what to do about the corruption” (Forester 9).

Implementation and Evaluation Issues

Even with effective facilitation and a consensus-based model, the challenge continues. Implementing policies developed in public participation processes can sometimes be the greatest challenge, and the effectiveness or success of public participation efforts is difficult to measure without careful evaluation that includes implementation as a component. A report by the Environmental Protection Agency reviews the variety of stakeholder involvement and public participation initiatives in place at the EPA and attempts to identify effective techniques and lessons learned across a diverse group of programs. In evaluating and reporting their efforts to involve the public in environmental decision-making, the EPA recognized that they are not doing enough to evaluate the effectiveness of their processes. Some of their programs include an evaluation component, but many do not, making it difficult to define success. Of interest here is a set of specific questions the report recommends for inclusion in
evaluations of public participation programs. The questions below are applicable beyond EPA programs, and could be useful in any agency’s evaluation of efforts to involve the public in decision-making processes.

- What were stakeholder/public perceptions regarding their ability to participate in the process?
- To what degree were those expectations met?
- What was the level of effort required by stakeholders/the public to participate?
- Were the goals and steps of the process clearly explained?
- To what extent did the effort meet those goals?
- Was the process fair?
- Was the process competent? (e.g. was the process well structured? was there proper leadership in place to guide the process?)

In addition to these questions, the extent to which the public’s input was utilized through policy implementation is an important measure of the process’s effectiveness.

The literature suggests that when public participation processes are legitimate and genuine, and when individuals are invited to participate, they will do so and provide valuable input to the policy-making process. Public participation most often occurs at the local level, where many close-to-home decisions are made that directly impact people’s lives. Citizens generally want to have a say in what is built near their homes, how development affects their environment, and construction of local infrastructure projects like transportation. In Nevada, water and land use issues have been important topics for the public’s involvement. The Bureau of Land Management looks to its Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) for input on public land use issues. There has been significant criticism of the federal Department of Energy because of its failure to actively
involve the public in meaningful ways on an issue very important to local citizens: the proposal to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) periodically convenes citizen advisory committees (CACs) on topics such as water conservation, water quality, and drought. SNWA also has a standing Groundwater Advisory Committee and, since 1999, the Youth Advisory Council.

While many local government agencies are engaged in public participation (voluntarily or as mandated by law), few have come to recognize young people as stakeholders in the policy process. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) realized that youth will be significantly impacted by the long-term implications of natural resource policies made today. By creating the Youth Advisory Council to include young people in the public participation process, SNWA also developed a youth engagement program that can serve as a case study to examine the effectiveness of a community-based approach to developing civic engagement among young people.

Case Study of the SNWA Youth Advisory Council

Background

Due to significant population growth and limited water resources in this desert community, issues and challenges surrounding water are at the forefront of community conversations and policy discussions in the Las Vegas area. The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) is a regional agency responsible for ensuring water quality, promoting water conservation and securing adequate future water resources. The authority launched its Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in 1999 to open a two-way dialogue with young people about water-related issues in a community where water is a
critically scarce resource. The council is composed of one student representative, selected by the school principal, from each local high school. There is no specific selection criteria dictated by the SNWA; each school is left to its own discretion in choosing a student.

During a one-year term on the council, the approximately 30 students meet regularly to learn about Southern Nevada water issues through educational presentations, tours to water facilities and natural sites, and a variety of discussions. After learning about local and regional water and environmental issues, the students work together to select a specific area of focus. They then plan and implement a water-related community project and/or develop policy recommendations related to their specific topic. At the end of their tenure on the council, the students report to the SNWA Board of Directors (local elected officials), who have the responsibility of managing the area’s water resources.

The SNWA Youth Advisory Council program is now concluding its fifth year. The approach and direction have varied each year, with some councils focusing on policy development and others engaging in hands-on community projects. Regardless of the specific approach, the councils all attempt to address community problems related to water and the environment. Two representative examples follow.

One year the YAC students were concerned that not enough water resources were available to serve the community for the next 100 years (the SNWA’s planning horizon had been 30 years), so they researched and recommended additional water resources and avenues for obtaining them. Another year the YAC members wanted to encourage homeowners to use desert landscape, as that is the most productive avenue for water conservation. Instead of just promoting the idea verbally, however, they secured
donations and built a desert demonstration garden at a neighborhood public school, where it is used as an outdoor learning lab for children and adults. The impact of their participation on the community is very positive, but impact of the program on its participants in terms of civic engagement has not previously been documented.

**Method**

In an effort to gather data about the effectiveness of community-based engagement programs, a quantitative multi-year case study of the SNWA Youth Advisory Council is underway, with preliminary data now available. The study attempts to measure the effect of the YAC program (as a specific example of the community problem-solving approach) on young people’s civic engagement. Thus, the independent variable is the Youth Advisory Council program and the dependent variable is civic engagement. The research is three-fold, as outlined below.

First, Youth Advisory Council students participated in a panel or time study in which they completed a pre-survey before the start of their Youth Advisory Council experience. Many of the questions address knowledge, attitudes and behavior about water, but those of most interest in this context relate to their attitudes toward, and participation in, democracy and community activities. At the conclusion of their tenure on the council, a post survey is administered using the same survey instrument. Changes between the pre-survey and the post-survey track the civic impact of students’ participation in the Youth Advisory Council. Because the YAC was not initially recognized as a civic engagement program, the surveys administered for the first three years focused almost entirely on water and environmental issues. Only the most recently
graduated YAC group provided significant pre- and post- data relative to civic engagement.

Second, in 2003 all former Youth Advisory Council students were asked to complete a longitudinal survey that was much shorter than the pre/post-questionnaire described above. It was designed to assess their attitudes and behaviors about water as well as their levels of civic engagement and participation. The questions were identical to ones included in the recent pre- and post-surveys, so responses were compared to post-survey responses where applicable. Ideally, positive attitudes and behaviors will be maintained from the post survey to the longitudinal survey, which captures current attitudes and behaviors for students who may have participated in the YAC as long as four years ago.

Third, in addition to comparing the longitudinal survey to the post-survey responses where applicable, a cross-sectional design will be used to compare the longitudinal data to identical questions on a national survey conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). This study, published in 2002, gathered baseline data about the civic participation of all age groups of Americans, reported by age category. For the purposes of this research, the YAC study will be compared to the age 15-25 category in the CIRCLE report. Given the national sample of the CIRCLE report, it is unlikely that the majority of respondents will have participated in a program like the YAC. Therefore, if there are significant differences between the responses from the YAC alumni and the general population of the same age group, this could serve as evidence that a community problem-solving
approach like the YAC can be successful in developing and maintaining civic
ingagement for young people.

The data from all of these studies will be analyzed using the Statistical Package
for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the panel or time study, the data sets will be
analyzed using a dependent T test, which is appropriate for this type of matched pairs
design. The longitudinal study will use the same analysis technique when the original
post surveys of the same students can be paired to determine the impact of time on the
average ratings for specific items. In addition, for the longitudinal study, the national
data (for the appropriate age grouping) on identical items will be compared to the results
from the longitudinal survey of YAC alumni using a T test.

Each year, the SNWA will continue to gather more data from Youth Advisory
Council students. Every new YAC group will respond to the pre- and post-questionnaires
and the longitudinal study will continue to be administered each summer. As the sample
size increases over time, larger data sets may allow for more definitive conclusions.
Even with more data, a remaining challenge will be the concern that the YAC students
may not be representative of the broader youth population, even before participating in
the SNWA program. This is because only one representative is selected from each high
school, and school principals tend to select those students who are already visible and
active in other activities. Further research with different samples of young people would
be valuable in providing more data to help determine the effectiveness of community-
based programs in engaging young people in democracy.
Preliminary Results

As noted earlier, the SNWA Youth Advisory Council program was not initiated with the express intent of enhancing civic engagement. However, anecdotal evidence over the first few years began to suggest the program could help build civic skills and feelings of efficacy. After recognizing this as a potential positive outcome of the YAC program, the SNWA began to more explicitly promote civic engagement and attempt to measure the programs' impacts on engagement. Prior to that time, evaluations of the YAC had focused on knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to water. So while the program has been in effect for five years, quantitative data related to civic engagement is only available for the most recent year. This data set will grow each year, though, and hopefully the accumulation of research over time will supply more definitive conclusions. Another step for the future will be to compare responses on the pre-survey to the national sample to determine if students in Las Vegas are significantly different from their national peers at the outset. This type of information is desirable because Nevada typically scores very low on nationwide studies of college attendance, scores on standardized tests, and other measures of youth development; Nevada also lags behind the national average for adult voter registration and turnout. This comparison was not possible with the current data set because the questions that matched the national survey were not included on the pre-survey.

The first data set for this initial phase of research is the pre- and post-questionnaires. Civic engagement questions were added to the questionnaire mid-year, so they appear on the post-survey but not on the pre-survey. However, the water-related questions included on the pre- and post-questionnaires demonstrate significant increases
in knowledge, as shown in Figure 11 below. Through the YAC process, students learned about the local history of water, the original water supply for Las Vegas as well as the current source, and about laws that promote water conservation and prohibit water waste.

![Figure 11: Water Knowledge 2002-2003](image)

On this same pre/post questionnaire, one item was to be completed only after the completion of the YAC process. The question asked students if their participation on the Youth Advisory Council had motivated them to participate in other community, political and/or public participation activities. Respondents strongly agreed with this item (mean of 1.25 on a scale of 1-7, where 1=strongly agree and 7=strongly disagree). They were also asked to provide additional comments related to this item; write-in responses are shown in Box 1.
This same item was included on the longitudinal survey, which was distributed in 2003 to all former YAC alumni, those who had participated from 1999 through 2003. This sample of students agreed with the item (mean of 1.93), and also provided insightful comments, as shown in Box 2.

Many of the comments in Box 2 reference a desire to be involved, but a lack of opportunities—or at least awareness of opportunities—to do so. This sentiment is supported by the national study conducted by CIRCLE, which found that young people are more likely to become involved when they are invited to participate or otherwise made aware of opportunities. As shown in Figure 12, the national study found that simply being asked makes a big difference in the likelihood of young people participating.
**Box 2: Longitudinal Survey (summer 2003)**

*My experience on the YAC has motivated me to continue to be involved in other community, political and/or public participation activities.*

**Mean response: 1.93**

(scale of 1-7, where 1=strongly agree and 7=strongly disagree)

**Write-in comments:**

"It taught me that each individual can make a difference if you work hard enough and stay involved in the community." (2002-2003)

"I realized how much fun it is, and to know I am making a difference is awesome." (2002-2003)

"Without involvement, our community wouldn't operate. Without people who are passionate about certain issues, our environment/surroundings would not be the same." (2001-2002)

"When I hear of similar committees or opportunities, I will take them." (2001-2002)

"We made a change in the community that has increased water conservation and affects students, and that is something that motivates me because changes can be made to improve our community." (2001-2002)

"I don't hear about many opportunities but when I do, I participate the best I can." (2001-2002)

"[The YAC program] allowed me to know that the community is interested in our ideas and viewpoints as a youth generation." (2000-2001)

"I participated in YAC because I was asked to. I thoroughly enjoyed it, but I have not since had another opportunity to work in a similar environment. Should I feel needed, I probably would participate in the community again." (1999-2000)

"YAC was a wonderful experience and motivated me to get active in the community..." (1999-2000: student quoted only had 17% attendance at YAC meetings/activities)
On the YAC longitudinal survey, students were asked about their participation in other activities "that teach me about the community and allow me to participate in public processes." On the longitudinal study, nearly 45 percent of respondents had not participated in any other activity; the same number (44.8 percent) had participated in one or two such activities; and only 10.3 percent had participated in more than two. Despite these responses that indicate many are not participating in multiple processes, 73.3 percent of respondents of the same longitudinal sample agreed with the statement, "There are adequate opportunities for me to participate in policy development and community decision making."

On a related note, students do appear to be active in other types of activities, including student government, clubs and sports, especially during high school. For the same sample of students (year 2002-2003), there was significant change in participation...
rates from the post questionnaire (completed while students were still in high school) to
the longitudinal survey (completed after high school graduation). The change in
participation in these activities can very likely be attributed to the organization and
structure of high school. Many of the activities shown in Figure 13 are part of the school
environment and others are often directly sponsored or promoted by a school club,
teacher or organization. As students leave high school and move on to work and/or
college life, there are fewer opportunities for participation at the school level, and a major
avenue for funneling information and hearing about opportunities from peers, teachers,
and administrators, is no longer available.

Figure 13: YAC Post vs Longitudinal:
Higher Participation during High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>YAC Post (during HS)</th>
<th>YAC Longitudinal (after HS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>church-religious</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>67.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>campaigns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school sports &amp;</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charity</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fundraising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, participation in certain types of groups can be compared from the YAC longitudinal survey to the national survey, as shown in Figure 14 below.

![Figure 14: YAC vs National Sample](image)

As illustrated above, the YAC students participated less than the national average in two areas: church and religious groups, and school sports and clubs. The lower rates of church participation may be tied to broader statements about the Las Vegas community, but cannot be explained without further research. The rates of school sport and club participation are interesting and actually provide some counter-evidence to the concern that the YAC sample is already more participative than their peers, because they are selected by school principals. Compared to the national sample at least, YAC members are much less active in school sports and clubs. It is possible that Las Vegas or Nevada students are generally lower than the national sample anyway, and this would be a good
reason to have a control group within the same community to verify data validity for
YAC participants. That was not possible at this stage of the research, however.

Also shown in Figure 14 above, YAC participants are reporting higher levels of
participation in political campaigns and charity fundraising than the national average for
that age group. This is what we would hope to see as a consequence of participating in
the YAC program, which theoretically provides motivation and builds a sense of efficacy
among participants. The YAC rate of participation in political campaigns is even higher
than the 16 percent reported for We the People alumni (see Chapter 1). The findings
become even more promising when looking at voting rates. Compared to the national
sample, YAC alumni report voting at much higher rates, as demonstrated in Figure 15.
As another point of comparison, although the question was different, 82 percent of We
the People alumni reported voting in the November 2000 election; 96.5 percent of YAC
respondents that said they “always” or “sometimes” vote. The YAC levels of voting
compared to the national sample is a very promising finding that, if supported by more
long-term data, could signal success for the YAC as a youth engagement strategy.
In comparing the YAC post-survey to the longitudinal survey, there was a slight positive increase in respondents’ attitudes toward participation. While the increases are statistically insignificant, the fact that positive attitudes and behaviors about participation are maintained over time, after participation on the YAC, is significant. For example, both in the post- and longitudinal surveys, the same sample of students agreed, “I can make a difference,” “being involved is important,” “I am interested in politics,” and “my experience on the YAC motivated me to continue to be involved.” Response percentages from the post-survey to the longitudinal survey, for the same sample of students, are shown in Figures 16-19. (By comparison, 48 percent of We the People alumni thought influencing the political structure was essential or very important.) Additionally, it appears that their commitment to water issues did not wane, as they continued to respond
positively to “I conserve water as much as I can,” from 83.3 percent on the post- to 100 percent on the longitudinal survey.
Figure 18: I am Interested in Politics
2002-2003 Students

Figure 19: YAC Experience Motivated Me to Continue to Be Involved
2002-2003 Students
In addition to the pre/post questionnaire and longitudinal survey data discussed above, additional anecdotal evidence and responses on the YAC program evaluation form (which asks specific questions about the format and value of the program) for all four years suggest the Youth Advisory Council is a valuable forum for development of civic and leadership skills that may translate into other aspects of participants’ lives. As discussed earlier, the YAC was not originally designed with civic engagement as the goal. It was feedback from students in the first few years of the program that caused the SNWA to notice the program’s potential in this arena. For example, students offered numerous comments, captured in Box 3 below, that brought these issues to the SNWA’s attention.

**Box 3: Write-In Comments, YAC Program Evaluation**

"I felt like I could do something to help change things." (1999-2000)
"I had the chance to make a difference in my community." (1999-2000)
"This experience has helped me improve my leadership, political and debating skills . . ." (1999-2000)
"I now understand more about the world around me (i.e. politics); I have also learned more about group dynamics and leadership." (1999-2000)
"[The YAC] gave me the chance to work with adults and to make a difference." (2002-2003)
"[Being part of the YAC] motivated me to do more community service." (2002-2003)
"I learned information about things affecting our community that many citizens don't know." (1999-2000)
"The best part of the YAC was having my opinions considered on an adult level." (1999-2000)
"I felt like what we said and did will make an impact on the world." (1999-2000)
"It was a great experience learning to work with others and learning to express our opinions." (2000-2001)
"[The YAC] was the best experience I have ever had." (2001-2002)
"I have felt that I can make a difference and that my concerns are heard." (2002-2003)
Figure 20 below illustrates participants’ responses to the item, “I gained leadership skills by serving on the YAC.” Because of these responses, the SNWA recently incorporated a national youth leadership curriculum (the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute, developed by the Center for Creative Leadership) into the existing YAC process. The leadership component is designed to help the students magnify their current experience to a broader context in which they can apply their skills to other community issues and activities unrelated to water. As the leadership curriculum is being used with the current YAC group (2003-2004), data on its effectiveness will be available next year. Because the below responses are occurring without any explicit focus on leadership development, the expectation is that responses will be higher after integrating the leadership curriculum.
For the above question about leadership skills, as well as other responses discussed throughout the paper, there are interesting differences from one YAC year to the next. Though the sample sizes are too small for the differences to be significant, they do merit some discussion. As shown in Figure 21 below, students in the second two YAC years rated several items on the longitudinal survey lower than the first two YAC years. Their mean responses to the items, “I am interested in politics,” “I follow government and public affairs,” and “My experience on the YAC has motivated me to continue to be involved,” are all substantially lower (which is more positive, as 1=strongly agree) for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 than for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. A number of reasons could explain the diversity, including sample differences (earlier students may have been less interested/engaged to begin with), or it could be that the effect of the YAC has diminished through the passage of time, as it was a longer span from their YAC service to survey completion for the older students.

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**Figure 21: Longitudinal Study- Differences by Year**

![Graph showing differences by year](image)
Another possible explanation for the differences could be programmatic. Each year the Youth Advisory Council students have the opportunity to select a water issue and decide how to address that issue. The group has significant latitude in making those decisions, and the direction they choose may impact the quality and type of experiences they gain from the process. For example, in the first two years, YAC students chose to spend their time developing policy recommendations and public education/outreach materials. They did not ever directly interact with the larger community. By contrast, in the third and fourth years, students decided to plan projects to directly and personally impact neighborhoods and individuals in the community. In the third year in particular (2001-2002), they made the effort to form numerous partnerships with individuals, businesses, and institutions in the community to accomplish their goal of designing and building a desert conservation garden that is used as an outdoor learning lab by school and community groups.

Comparing attendance records by year shows that students in years three and four also had higher participation rates throughout the YAC process, as demonstrated in Figure 22. The second year group had the lowest attendance, which could have been caused by the organization giving them a narrow list of topics from which to choose (these administration issues are discussed in the next chapter). Again, the differences between years is not statistically significant, but may indicate that students in the third and fourth years were more engaged and remained more interested in their activities throughout the YAC process.
The findings are not conclusive enough to say that the “project” approach is clearly preferable to the “policy” approach, but there does seem to be value in giving young people the opportunity to take their ideas to the broader community and actually put them into action. This strategy is supported by researchers and activists in the field of youth engagement, including literature by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service.7

Conclusion

Agencies that are involved in setting public policy at all levels are increasingly turning to the public for input in the policy-making process. While some of this public participation is mandated by law, much is voluntary and driven by the idea that in a democracy, citizens should have a say in making decisions that affect their lives. Public
participation comes in many different forms, with differing levels of empowerment for the public and varying degrees of success, often driven by the ability of agencies to successfully facilitate and manage expectations. Despite the challenges inherent in public participation, there is significant agreement that, at least for issues directly affecting them, the public should be involved in making decisions.

It is rare that the “public” in public participation is defined to include young people, but the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) made the decision to include youth as stakeholders, and thus developed their Youth Advisory Council. Although the original intent of the program was not civic engagement, its potential positive effects on youth engagement soon became clear. While there are many efforts and programs working to promote youth civic engagement across the country, their long-term effects are unknown. To help fill this research void, the SNWA embarked on a multi-year study to measure the long-term effects of the Youth Advisory Council program on participants. Preliminary data indicate the Youth Advisory Council model, one example of the community-based approach, may be a promising avenue for engaging young people. Additional longitudinal research in coming years will be crucial in developing more definitive conclusions. Anecdotally, many students find great value in the program, indicating it develops leadership skills and provides motivation for further community participation.
Data input and analysis for this project was conducted by Micheal Schneweis, a Management Analyst for the Southern Nevada Water Authority. The author expresses special thanks for his expertise and guidance in interpreting the data.

For Forester, municipal planning processes include issues related to the environment, neighborhood housing, urban design and economic development.

See www.snwa.com


For participating in political campaigns, the responses also can be compared to a study conducted by the Center for Civic Education of participants in their “We the People” classroom civic education program. Sixteen percent of self-selected alumni from that program indicated they participated in political campaigns, which is a much higher percentage than the national average for the age group, but slightly lower than for the YAC participants.

See the following:
CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

As presented in the previous chapter, preliminary data indicate the Youth Advisory Council model, one example of the community-based approach, may be a promising avenue for engaging young people in democracy. It is hoped that further research, as the longitudinal study continues every year, will strengthen and confirm that the Youth Advisory Council is an effective tool for increasing youth civic engagement. Its impacts are broader than the young people themselves, though. Through thorough planning and thoughtful implementation, the sponsoring agency and broader community can gain significantly from such a process. Involving young people in addressing community issues at the local level can infuse new life into agencies and communities, while helping to prepare young people to become active, engaged citizens in our democracy. In that context, this chapter will describe benefits, planning and implementation processes, and lessons learned as recommendations to those who may wish to develop a similar program. After a discussion specific to the SNWA Youth Advisory Council, this chapter will also present recommendations and best practices from other researchers and community organizations involved in various types of youth engagement programs. The Youth Advisory Council will be assessed in light of these
recommendations. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research and a summary of this present work.

Benefits of the Youth Advisory Council Program

In desiring to engage youth in community issues about water, the SNWA was aware that young people would likely have a different perspective. The agency was not aware, however, of the tremendous insight and benefits they would provide. It soon became clear that youth really “think outside the box.” They are not bound by cynicism or entrenched in traditional boundaries. In fact, young people are far from politically correct; they speak their minds and fight to uphold their beliefs regardless of political or organizational restraints. This fresh, often idealistic perspective is coupled with a more extensive and comprehensive view of the future. Because of their age, young people naturally want to plan for a much longer time horizon. Having grown up in an age of technology, today’s youth are also incredibly media savvy. They are sophisticated and creative in their ideas and uses of all media and forms of communication. While it is clear that young people are idealistic in their views and proposed solutions, they are not impractical. On the contrary, SNWA YAC members could accurately be termed “pragmatic idealists.” They understand the realities of finances and the power of public opinion, and factor such understanding into their proposed solutions. In short, today’s youth are a hybrid of extraordinary new ideas, remarkable insight and surprisingly sophisticated understanding.

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These assets and characteristics of youth make it advantageous for an agency to engage youth in making decisions about their community. Involving young people results in broader viewpoints for current decision-making. It also has the effect of shifting policy, if necessary, in the direction desired by those who will really be impacted by policies’ long-term effects. From an organizational standpoint, involving youth is an ideal way to develop good relations with future customers and voters. Even more important, such a public participation experience will educate the decision-makers of tomorrow, helping to secure an informed populace. Another, often unexpected, benefit the agency receives is less tangible. It is the gratification that comes from watching youth tackle tough, complicated issues and successfully address them. Young people are inspiring. They stimulate the organization and decision makers, motivating them to expand their perspectives and consider new options.

The agency is not the only beneficiary in a process like the YAC. Not surprisingly, the community itself probably receives the most tangible benefits of young people’s involvement. The students’ project and/or policy recommendations

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**Box 4**

**Benefits to Agency/Organization**
- Expand, broaden viewpoints for current decision making
- Move policy in direction desired by those who will be around to care
- Develop good relations with future customers and voters
- Educate tomorrow’s decision makers
- Be inspired!

**Benefits to Community**
- Far-reaching messages carried to family, friends, school (teachers and students), media, general public
- Actual impact of project or policy changes
- Ongoing example of youth as leaders, engaged citizens and environmental stewards

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have a direct impact, which has varied from lengthening a resource-planning horizon to developing pollution prevention advertisements to engaging a school, neighborhood, and business partners to build a desert conservation garden as a learning center for the community. Through the students' efforts, community issues and concerns can literally be addressed and often solved. This heightens the awareness and activism of the broader community, as young people become positive examples and catalysts for change. The youth develop a stewardship and sense of responsibility that benefit both their current and future communities.

**Youth Advisory Council Planning and Implementation**

To receive these benefits that come from involving youth in making community decisions, an organization must plan carefully to provide a successful process. Preparation activities can be grouped into two broad categories: internal planning and external coordination.

**Internal Planning**

Ensuring that input from youth is actually considered and used (rather than their participation being a mock exercise) should be paramount in the planning process. This will require significant internal coordination within the organization and with the elected officials or other decision-makers responsible for setting policy. A skilled facilitator can be very valuable in ensuring the legitimacy and integrity of the public participation process, making student input meaningful. A budget should be identified and the goals or outcomes of the process must be defined and clearly communicated. Key questions
should be discussed and answered internally before embarking on a Youth Advisory Council process:

- What is the specific issue or issues the young people will address (or is it open)?
- How much influence will their recommendations have?
- What will be the process and timeline for reporting and implementing their project and recommendations?
- What, if any, parameters or sideboards are necessary to keep the group away from a topic or discussion on which the organization does not want, or cannot use, their input?
- What educational experiences and training will the organization provide as background on the issue(s) so that input from youth is based on accurate and complete information?

Before beginning the first SNWA Youth Advisory Council, the agency developed a strategic plan to define the goals, process and timeline. At this time, civic engagement had not been identified as a specific goal of the YAC; the primary goal of the program was to receive input from local youth about water and environmental issues. A secondary goal, which actually had to be accomplished prior to the primary goal, was to educate the youth about a broad spectrum of local water and environmental issues so they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Planning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strategic plan with goals and budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ensure input will be used (buy-in from decision-makers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Plan for necessary education/training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Anticipate facilitation needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Coordination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coordinate with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coordinate with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Build enthusiasm and interest among students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
could provide informed input. In the first year of the YAC, the students selected two specific areas of interest to them after they had participated in the education component to learn about the issues. In the second year, organization decision-makers identified two broad categories of water issues and the students selected more specific topics within that scope. In subsequent years, SNWA adopted the strategy of letting the students select issues of interest to them; this seemed to promote higher levels of engagement and involvement, which now has been corroborated by the research.

External Coordination

Once such preparations and decisions were made internally, SNWA worked to partner with the local school district. The agency developed a proposal for the Youth Advisory Council process and presented it to the school district superintendent and the school board, asking for their approval and support. They agreed to help promote the program and hence sent letters (prepared by SNWA) to each of the high school principals introducing the Youth Advisory Council program and asking for their cooperation. After that introductory letter, the SNWA worked directly with the principals, further explaining the program and asking for one student representative from each high school. (SNWA also invites the private high schools to participate.) Each principal uses his or her discretion in selecting a student; many delegate that responsibility to another staff member, often a school counselor, student council advisor or science teacher.

Throughout the Youth Advisory Council year, the SNWA coordinator continues to keep in touch with contacts at the school district and individual schools. Administrators and teachers receive correspondence apprising them of developments, praising student achievements, and inviting them to significant events, including the
culmination in which the Youth Advisory Council students present their recommendations to the SNWA Board of Directors. Especially in the first few years, while trying to promote and explain a new program, the agency learned that persistence in communicating with school personnel is key. It often takes numerous follow-up faxes and phone calls to finally receive student appointments from every school (and some schools, despite all effort, still decline to participate) but each additional student brings another layer of insight, so such persistence is rewarded.

Coordination with, and approval from, parents is also critical. SNWA secures release forms and field trip permits signed by both the school principal and a parent in order to fulfill insurance and liability requirements. They also send a letter to parents giving them specific information about their student's involvement on the council and their role, all the while congratulating them on being the parent of such an outstanding child. Parents are also included in ongoing invitations and updates, so they can witness up close the council activities and achievements.

At the beginning of each council year, it is necessary to build up enthusiasm and interest among the student representatives. SNWA achieves this through the staff coordinator's personal interaction and relationship development with the students, starting with making phone calls to each of the students prior to the first meeting. The SNWA coordinator makes these calls personally, talking with the student about the council process and activities, and answering questions and concerns. We found that it is important to maintain this relationship between the students and the coordinator throughout the year. Having one staff contact for the students creates an environment of trust and builds relationships. While the planning and logistics may seem tedious and
trivial, for this program the details are crucial to making each year successful in the eyes of the organization, community, and students.

**Lessons Learned through the Youth Advisory Council**

In 2004, SNWA completed its fifth Youth Advisory Council year. Different students have brought unique personalities, ideas and perspectives, providing learning experiences for the agency. The lessons learned from working with young people in this capacity address both practical implementation issues and the more complex challenge of ensuring that youth input is meaningful.

An ongoing challenge each year deals with the reality that many students who are appointed to the Youth Advisory Council are those already involved in numerous school, sport and extra-curricular activities. To minimize scheduling difficulties, the students choose the meeting days, times and frequency (usually twice a month on a weekday evening for two hours). The meetings are kept on task and on time, accomplishing most work within that specified meeting time so it is not necessary for the students to do extensive outside research or assignments.

Although all of the students on the SNWA Youth Advisory Council are at least 16 years old, many of them still rely on their parents for transportation. To be courteous to the parents and acknowledge their support, their schedules are also considered as the students select their meeting days and times. It is important to finish meetings on schedule so parents are not kept waiting. SNWA also provides a password-protected web board for the Youth Advisory Council so the students can interact with each other and staff, continuing discussion and sharing information between meetings.
Young people, even at the high school age, are somewhat “lecture-resistant.” They do not want to just sit and listen, and the YAC meeting format should be distinct from a school classroom environment. Thus, the YAC meetings consist of group discussions and debates, interactive activities and small group work. The meetings are informal, with built-in time for social conversation and a meal, which students eat throughout the meeting.

It is important for youth participants to have time to interact with each other and develop relationships, in addition to their substantive work on issues. With very few exceptions, the students from different schools have never met until the initial YAC meeting; to facilitate building relationships and friendships, SNWA plans team-building activities, especially in the first few meetings, and provides social interaction or “bonding time” throughout the year. SNWA also tries to express appreciation for the students’ participation and input in creative ways. As mentioned, meals are provided at every meeting; SNWA also distributes personalized gifts at two special occasions during the year: a reunion event each August in which all past and present Youth Advisory Council members gather together for fun, food, games and a motivational speaker, and the year’s culmination in which students present their report and recommendations to the SNWA Board of Directors. Students who participate in at least 75 percent of the meetings are also invited to a special appreciation night, for which the agency charters a small boat and the group enjoys a catered dinner cruise on Lake Mead. This event, after the stress of presenting recommendations is over, is a final night of fun that gives SNWA an opportunity to express gratitude to the students.
As adolescents, young people are often inconsistent in their energy and sophistication. To address this inconsistency, SNWA has learned to be flexible with meeting agendas and expectations. By preparing several activities and opportunities for input at each meeting, SNWA gives the students a variety of options, each requiring different skills and energy levels, all of which would accomplish the same goal. This allows staff to assess and meet the unique energy and/or situation of each meeting without falling behind schedule.

The need to plan and generate internal support for meaningful use of youth input was discussed earlier. SNWA learned quickly that even when that background work is done internally, sometimes the students doubt the value (or intended use) of their input and participation. Throughout the year, the agency works to continually reinforce the students’ value and importance by promoting media events about the Youth Advisory Council. Staff also frequently plans opportunities for the SNWA General Manager to interact with the students. As the organization’s leader takes time to listen to their ideas and suggestions in progress, they begin to understand that the organization believes in them individually and as a group. Trust is also gained through relationship building between the students and staff coordinator. This challenge of students doubting the legitimacy of their role diminished significantly after the first few years of the program. As new students heard about the activities of previous YAC groups, either from their peers or through the news media, they quickly grasped the vision and potential impact of their participation.
A fundamental challenge of public participation with any age group is implementation or use of their recommendations (as discussed in Chapter 4). This challenge is compounded with a group that has to convince their “elders” that they really understand the issues, have something special to offer, and hence should be taken seriously. SNWA believes it is able to overcome this challenge with the SNWA Youth Advisory Council, primarily by avoiding superficiality in the analysis of issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numerous other activities</td>
<td>Students select meeting times, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation issues</td>
<td>Students select meetings; web board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture-resistant</td>
<td>Interactive and group work; breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-doubt about role</td>
<td>Media events; high-level interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need parent/school support</td>
<td>Staff contact, invitations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to “have fun”</td>
<td>Social interaction/appreciation events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent energy, etc.</td>
<td>Flexible agenda, expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop useful recommendations</td>
<td>Avoid superficiality in analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of the complexity, agency staff supports the students as they delve deeply (through research, interaction with experts, and field trips), and provides any resources necessary to ensure complete understanding of all facets and viewpoints. Students then analyze and make hard choices to reach consensus in developing their recommendations. They tackle some hard issues, yet their recommendations are taken seriously and many are implemented because their analyses demonstrate significant understanding and insight.
Several organizations across the nation have also found success in their youth engagement programs, and developed recommendations based on their experiences. United Way of America, through its “Mobilization for America’s Children” project, is promoting involving young people as equal partners in non-profit organizations to bring about community change. Similar to SNWA’s findings with the Youth Advisory Council, United Way recognized several organizational benefits of such a process (5-6):

- Change and revitalize the image of your organization
- Tap a new pool of potential donors (for charitable organizations)
- Expand your volunteer corps
- Generate new fundraising strategies
- Lend expertise to decisions
- Facilitate long-term growth (through commitment from youth)
- Strengthen diversity and organizational capacity
- Promote intergenerational collaboration
- Increase visibility of your organization

United Way also identified twelve necessary elements of youth involvement to ensure young people are respected and meaningfully engaged when involved with a community organization, particularly when serving on governing boards of non-profit organizations (7-18). Other researchers (Zeldin et al 9-10) studied a variety of youth participation programs and identified six conditions as being most likely to facilitate positive outcomes when engaging youth through a community organization. Separately, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which has a well-established Youth Advisory
Board charged with distributing approximately $200,000 in grant funds each year, has identified six keys to success for involving youth. The Foundation also provides guidelines for adults in organizations working with youth (www.emkf.org). The California Adolescent Health Collaborative suggests nine areas in which an organization should focus its planning efforts to develop a successful process (Clayton et al 7-10). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the National League of Cities (NLC) is interested in promoting youth involvement at the municipal level, and provides tips to help municipalities promote youth participation (5).

The specific recommendations and best practices identified by all of these organizations are included in Appendix 7. While none of them are identical, all of the recommendations and suggested keys to success share seven common ideas or themes, summarized below.

1. There is a commitment to youth participation from the top of the organization.
2. An adult champion or leader advocates and becomes the catalyst for youth participation within the organization.
3. Logistical issues (particularly, accommodating young people’s schedules) are effectively addressed.
4. Training and orientation is provided for youth participants.
5. There is ongoing communication with parents and schools.
6. Young people are treated as equal partners with adults.
7. Recruitment of youth promotes diversity, so youth representatives mirror their community.

These seven criteria are intended as points for discussion and consideration rather than as a mathematical equation for measuring success. In that context, it is interesting to...
consider the SNWA Youth Advisory Council (YAC) program in light of these criteria. The SNWA program generally meets the first five criteria, with less conformity along the last two points. First, from the beginning of the SNWA program there was enthusiastic support from the senior executive as well as from the elected officials. Because of this organizational commitment to young people, their participation was legitimate instead of symbolic or tokenistic. Second, the staff member that originally created the Youth Advisory Council continues to coordinate all youth programs for the organization and has been an avid champion for the inclusion of young people in the organization’s activities and decision-making processes.

The SNWA’s efforts around the third, fourth, and fifth criteria are discussed earlier in this chapter. Briefly, logistical issues are addressed in a variety of ways, including allowing the youth participants to select their own meeting days and times; Youth Advisory Council participants spend the first few months of their tenure in training and orientation, including learning from the experts and going on site visits; and the staff coordinator continually corresponds with schools and parents throughout the entire YAC process.

The SNWA program does not meet so easily the final two criteria. Instead of actually serving on the governing board, as equal partners with adults, the Youth Advisory Council is its own separate board, comprised only of students, with an advisory role for recommending policy. Although many of their policy ideas have been implemented, and the students have more latitude and autonomy in carrying out community projects, the YAC program does not involve youth as equal partners with adults. Finally, the way YAC students are recruited (each high school appoints one
representative) does not ensure diversity. By leaving the selection of students in the hands of high school principals, the SNWA does not actively recruit for diverse representation; that said, the YAC has had significant racial diversity represented on the council each year. Gender, however, has not been representative of the population, with a much higher proportion of females on the council.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The case study in Chapter 4 points to some areas for further research. Continuing the existing longitudinal study will provide a larger data set, and ultimately, more definitive conclusions. Rather than comparing to national data, though, a peer control group would be valuable for evaluating the program’s effects, especially given the possible anomalies of Nevada’s population. Additionally, further research with different samples of young people would help to overcome the probable bias attached to the SNWA YAC by virtue of the selection process, in which only one representative is selected from each high school. All of these topics for further research are discussed in the previous chapter.

Scholars interested in pursuing further research might follow recommendations from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). By conducting focus groups with young people around the country and surveying a nationally representative sample of youth and adults, CIRCLE developed four categories of indicators to measure youth civic engagement: Civic, Electoral, Political Voice, and Attentiveness. A description of all of the indicators and instructions from CIRCLE for using them in research are included in Appendix 8.
This current research, as well as the engagement indicators developed by CIRCLE, focus on civic attitudes and behaviors, but another potential area for study is to document the skills that are developed through a youth participation program like the YAC. Anecdotal evidence and quotes from participants indicate civic skills are acquired in such a process, but they have not been systematically identified. According to Robert Putnam (338-339), civic skills necessary for democratic participation include the ability to cooperate, run meetings, speak in public (including expressing opinions), write letters, organize projects, and debate public issues with civility. Civic skills might also include the abilities to reason and research. Along with civic skills, civic virtues such as active participation in public life, trustworthiness, and reciprocity can be acquired through youth participation programs. Formal documentation of the acquisition of civic skills and virtues through programs like the SNWA Youth Advisory Council would help strengthen the argument for additional support of youth engagement activities.

Summary Conclusion

This research began with a review of data indicating young people’s participation in civic and political life is lower than in years past and has been declining for several decades. Although it is typical for young people to participate less than their parents, these declining levels of engagement are not entirely attributable to life cycle effects; instead, they are linked to generational effects, a change in society itself instead of individuals as their lives progress. While young people’s participation rates are low on virtually any indicator, they are higher for civic activities (including volunteering and community problem solving) than they are for electoral activities, including voting.
Whether compared with older Americans or with younger Americans from earlier years, today’s young adults are significantly less interested in, and knowledgeable about, politics or public affairs; less likely to register or vote; less likely to participate in politics beyond voting; and less likely to become involved in community issues. A major factor contributing to young people’s disengagement is that they do not think their participation will make a difference.

The extent to which this information is distressing depends upon whether one sides with Alexander Hamilton and Walter Lippmann in believing government is best run by experts, or with John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and this author, who believe civic engagement is crucial in a democratic society. It has been argued that civic participation positively contributes to both the development of the individual and to the improvement of society as a whole. Particularly for young people, early opportunities for participation lay the groundwork for lifelong engagement, through which they improve themselves and their communities. More than just learning about civic and political processes, actual participation in them is key to engaging young people.

Recognizing the importance of youth engagement, a number of organizations and advocates have developed proposals for a national youth policy. While some proposals, particularly the Younger Americans Act (H.R. 17, 2001), received wide support, none of them ultimately passed. This has not prevented local communities from developing youth engagement programs, however. In cities and towns across the country, non-profit organizations and youth-serving agencies are actively working to engage youth at the community level. Such programs that promote youth civic engagement fall into six categories: 1) Youth Leadership Development; 2) Role-Playing or Modeling Programs;
3) Youth Representation; 4) Youth Advisory Councils; 5) Issue-Based Youth Activism or Advocacy; and 6) National Networks or Clearinghouses. Most of the programs share in common a focus on actual experience and action, providing opportunities for young people to address real issues at the community level. While it is assumed that such activities increase young people's civic engagement, this assumption has not been well researched in terms of long-term impact on participants.

To help test this assumption, a small-scale case study of one community-based civic engagement program was conducted. The Southern Nevada Water Authority Youth Advisory Council (YAC), which arose out of a commitment to involving stakeholders in public policy rather than a desire to engage young people, was started in 1999. Every year, student representatives from local high schools serve on the council. They learn about water issues through field trips and presentations, then select a specific area of focus, on which they offer policy recommendations and/or plan and implement a community project. The research of the YAC's impact on participants' civic engagement is three-fold. It consists of a panel or time study that compares students' responses on a questionnaire before and after their participation; a longitudinal survey with identical questions to track changes in participants' attitudes and behaviors over several years after they graduated; and a cross-sectional design to compare the longitudinal data to identical questions on a national survey. The limitations of this research were discussed above, in addition to within Chapter 4.

Results from the first year of the YAC study are promising. Participants' water knowledge increased by an average of 47 percent, and respondents indicate their YAC experience motivated them to participate in other community and political activities. Not
surprisingly, young people find such activities more readily accessible during high school than after graduation. Compared to the national sample, after serving on the YAC, students participate in political campaigns and charity fundraising at higher rates than their peers. They also report voting at significantly higher rates (58.6 percent of YAC participants say they “always” vote, compared with 24.2 percent for the same age cohort at the national level). Quotes from the students indicate a significant feeling of efficacy and sense that they have (and can continue to) make a difference in their community, contrasting with the opposite feeling reported by national data in Chapter 2. These positive attitudes and behaviors are maintained over time, as many as four years after the students complete their service on the YAC.

While the various groups of YAC students each year demonstrate higher levels of engagement than the national average, there are variations across the years, the reasons for which are not entirely known. Possible explanations, however, include programmatic decisions, including how much autonomy youth are given throughout the process. As discussed earlier in this chapter, thoughtful and thorough planning and implementation of youth participation processes are necessary to ensure the greatest success for both the students and the broader community. When young people are given the opportunity to participate in their communities, and are provided support in doing so, the potential for positive outcomes is tremendous. Organizations grow and prosper with youth involvement, community change is fostered and sustained as young people learn they can make a difference and take action on issues that affect them, and the young people themselves are motivated to continue their participation in civic and political activities.
In the end, youth participation programs are valuable because they provide a vehicle to engage America’s young people in democracy.

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1 By state law in Nevada, each county is a school district. Hence, in Southern Nevada, there is only one school district, the Clark County School District, but it is the sixth largest in the nation with nearly 300,000 students.
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APPENDIX 1

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR
YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAMMING

PREPARED BY THE
NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON FAMILIES & YOUTH

www.ncfy.com
The following is a list of Federal agencies that support community-based programs and initiatives benefiting young people and their families. A brief description and Internet address, when available, are provided for each agency. Please also note that Federal programs and initiatives are subject to change because of legislative or executive branch actions.

Corporation for National and Community Service

http://www.cns.gov

- **Office of AmeriCorps**
  
  http://www.americorps.org

  AmeriCorps, the domestic Peace Corps, is a private-public partnership dedicated to strengthening and improving communities through the service of its more than 25,000 members. In return for their service, members receive assistance in financing their education.

  - **Office of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps**
    
    http://www.americorps.org/nccc/index.html

    The Office of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps focuses on projects that protect and conserve natural resources, promote public safety, and meet the educational needs of young people. Some Corps members also are trained to assist with disaster relief. Corps members receive training before they begin their community service and are responsible for identifying, planning, and completing their service projects. The program is open to young adults, ages 18-24.

- **Office of Learn and Serve America**
  
  http://www.learnandserve.org

  Learn and Serve America provides grants to teachers and community members who involve students in community service related to their school studies. Learn and Serve America has two components: (1) Learn and Serve K-12: School- and Community-Based programs, which support service learning for elementary, middle, and high school students, and (2) Learn and Serve America Higher Education programs, which support postsecondary, school-based service learning projects.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

http://www.usda.gov
• Natural Resources and Environment
  U.S. Forest Service

  http://www.fs.fed.us

Since 1960, the U.S. Forest Service has overseen use of the Nation's forests for a variety of purposes, such as for recreation, timber, and fish and wildlife. Part of the mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to provide training, education, and employment to the unemployed, the underemployed, and young people.

  o Human Resource Programs

  http://www.doleta.gov/programs/factsht/jobcorps.htm

Through an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service (U.S. Department of the Interior) operate 30 Job Corps Centers. The Job Corps, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, is a residential education and training program for unemployed and undereducated youth. When operated by either the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service, Job Corps centers are called Civilian Conservation Centers.

In addition, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service oversee the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a summer employment program jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior. In the YCC, youth work, learn, and earn pay by doing projects that further the conservation of natural resources within the United States.

• Research, Education, and Economics
  Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

  http://www.reeusda.gov

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's mission is to advance research and education in the food and agricultural sciences through cooperative partnerships between institutions of higher learning and the public and private sectors.

A special focus of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service is the Children, Youth, and Families At Risk Initiative. This initiative helps communities support children and youth in leading positive and secure lives while they develop the skills necessary for transitioning into fulfilling, responsible adulthood.

  o Families, 4-H, and Nutrition

  http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/programs/baseprog.htm

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Families, 4-H, and Nutrition offers model educational programs for families and youth to promote human development and to stress the importance of good nutrition in human development and well-being.

- **State and Private Forestry**  
  Cooperative Forestry Staff  
  Conservation Education  
  
  [http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/ce/index.cfm](http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/ce/index.cfm)

  The Conservation Education (CE) program provides educational activities to help people learn about natural resources and how to use them responsibly. The CE works with existing Federal and State programs, schools, and community organizations to further environmental education. Several CE projects seek to help urban youth become aware of career opportunities in the natural resources field.

**U.S. Department of Defense**


- **Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness**  
  Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs  
  Directorate for Civil Military Programs  

  Through the National Guard, the Civil Military Programs of the U.S. Department of Defense offer training opportunities to civilian youth who have dropped out of high school. These programs help youth enhance their life skills and employment potential while rebuilding the Nation's infrastructure.

- **Personnel and Readiness**  
  Office of the Under Secretary of Defense  
  Personnel Support, Families, and Education  
  Office of Family Policy, Support and Services  

  The Office of Family Policy, Support and Services establishes policy regarding family violence for all U.S. Department of Defense components. Each military service has a Family Advocacy Program (FAP) designed to prevent, identify, report, intervene in, and treat child abuse and neglect and spousal abuse. The Office assists each of the military services in developing, establishing, and maintaining a FAP. The Office also is responsible for programming for children and youth living on military bases.

**U.S. Department of Education**

• 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program

http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CLCs) Program provides funding to public schools to collaborate with community agencies and institutions to implement or expand projects that provide (1) after-school learning opportunities for children in a safe, drug-free environment and (2) educational, recreational, health, and social service programs for residents of all ages within a local community. The Web site contains information on available funding, grant application information and forms, a list of free regional workshops for potential applicants, examples of successful applications, and links to related Web sites.

• Education Outreach Branch
  Student Services Division
  Office of Postsecondary Education
  Office of Higher Education Programs
  Upward Bound Program


The Office of Postsecondary Education supports and coordinates activities that assist institutions of higher learning and help students pursuing a postsecondary education.

Upward Bound, administered by the Office of Higher Education Programs, is a program that seeks to provide low-income and potential first-generation college students with the skills and motivation necessary for success in education beyond high school. Students in the Upward Bound program attend daily classes in the summer and on Saturdays during the school year, receive health and comprehensive counseling services, and participate in a variety of extracurricular activities.

• Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services provides formula grants to States and organizations to improve educational opportunities for children (including abused and neglected children) and adults with disabilities.

• Safe and Drug Free Schools Program

http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS
The Safe and Drug Free Schools Program strives to reduce youth involvement in illicit drug use through education and prevention activities. The reauthorized Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 (Title IV of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 [P.L. 103-382]) expanded the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program to include activities to prevent youth violence.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.hhs.gov

See also the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' "YouthInfo" home page (http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/fysb/youthinfo/index.htm), which includes statistics on young people, potential funding sources, information on the positive youth development approach, information for parents of adolescents, and links to other youth-related home pages.

- **Administration for Children and Families**
  http://www.acf.hhs.gov

  The Administration for Children and Families is responsible for Federal programs that promote the social and economic well-being of families and youth.

  - **Administration for Native Americans**

    The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) promotes social and economic self-sufficiency for American Indians, Native Hawaiians, Native Alaskans, and Native American Pacific Islanders. Grants from the ANA focus on various areas of concern to Native American youth and families, such as the availability of social services, employment, and prevention and treatment of alcoholism.

- **Administration on Children, Youth and Families**

  The Administration on Children, Youth and Families administers programs that support communities' efforts to provide services to families in crisis and to improve the quality of life for children, young people, and families in difficult circumstances.
• **Child Care Bureau**
  

  The Child Care Bureau seeks to enhance the quality, affordability, and supply of child care available to all families. The Bureau administers Federal funds to States, Territories, and tribes to assist low-income families in accessing quality child care for children while parents work or participate in education or training.

• **Children's Bureau**
  

  The Children’s Bureau focuses on strengthening families, improving State and local child welfare services, finding permanent homes for children who cannot stay in their own homes, and improving the quality and availability of child care services. The Children's Bureau accomplishes these goals through entitlement and grant programs for State child welfare agencies and Native American tribes.

• **Family and Youth Services Bureau**
  

  The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) provides national leadership on youth issues and assists individuals and organizations in providing effective, comprehensive services for youth in difficult circumstances and their families. FYSB funds grant programs that support locally based youth services.

• **Head Start Bureau**
  

  The Head Start Bureau funds comprehensive developmental, health, social, and parent-involvement services for low-income preschool children and their families. Head Start grants are awarded to public or private nonprofit agencies that offer a range of services designed to provide children with educational, social, medical, and mental health assistance.

• **Administration on Developmental Disabilities**
  

  The Administration on Developmental Disabilities supports programs that protect the rights and promote the self-sufficiency of youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families.
• Office of Public Health and Science

http://www.osophs.dhhs.gov/ophs

The Office of Public Health and Science provides leadership and coordination for activities related to public health and science within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

  o Office of Population Affairs

http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov

The Office of Population Affairs (OPA) provides resources and policy advice related to population and reproductive health issues, including family planning and adolescent pregnancy.

  • Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs

http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/titlexx/oapp.html

The Adolescent Family Life Program, administered by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, supports the development of innovative programs that encourage adolescents to delay sexual activity and that provide health, education, and social services to pregnant and parenting adolescents and their families.

  • Office of Family Planning

http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/titlexx/ofp.html

Through its Family Planning Program, the Office of Family Planning provides funding for comprehensive family planning services to States, family planning councils, Planned Parenthood affiliates, and other public and private entities that provide family planning services. Through its grantees, the Family Planning Program serves women and adolescents at high risk for unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

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• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) mission is to promote health and quality of life by preventing and controlling disease, injury, and disability.

○ National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/nccdhome.htm

The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's (NCCDPHP's) mission is to prevent death and disability from chronic diseases; promote maternal, infant, and adolescent health; and encourage healthy personal behaviors. The NCCDPHP achieves these goals in partnership with health and education agencies, major voluntary associations, the private sector, and Federal agencies.

• Division of Adolescent and School Health

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash

The Adolescent and School Health Division provides support to national, State, and local agencies that address adolescent health. The Division also supports the development and dissemination of guidelines for effective school health programs and policies.

• Division of Nutrition & Physical Activity

Maternal and Infant Health Branch

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/m_infant.htm

The Maternal and Infant Health Branch addresses issues relating to the health of mothers and their children. The Branch's activities include administering adolescent pregnancy prevention programs.
Office on Smoking and Health

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/mission.htm

The Office on Smoking and Health serves as the focal point for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' smoking and health activities. The Office produces the Surgeon General's report on the health consequences of smoking, surveys and analyzes tobacco use and its impact, provides financial assistance to State health departments, and conducts national public information and education campaigns about the health risks associated with smoking.

- National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention
  http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/nchstp.html

  The National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention funds research and programs designed to better inform health care practitioners and others about the spread of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and tuberculosis. As part of its mission, the Center seeks to improve young people's access to preventive health care.

- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
  http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/ncipchm.htm

  The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control conducts and monitors research on the causes of, risks for, and preventive measures against intentional and unintentional injuries.

Division of Violence Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/dvp.htm

The Division of Violence Prevention focuses on youth violence, family and intimate violence, suicide, and firearm injuries. The Division supports preventive
projects and activities that complement approaches used by law enforcement and within schools.

- **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services**
  
  [http://cms.hhs.gov](http://cms.hhs.gov)
  
  The mission of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, formerly the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), is to strengthen the health care services and information available to Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries and to help beneficiaries and their caregivers become active and informed participants in their health care decisions.

  - **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)**
    
    
    HCFA, along with the Health Resources and Services Administration, administers the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which provides Federal funds to help States expand health care coverage to the Nation's uninsured children.

- **Health Resources and Services Administration**
  
  [www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov)
  
  The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA's) mission is to contribute to improving the health of the Nation by ensuring access to health care for populations that are disadvantaged or underserved.

  - **Bureau of Primary Health Care**
    
    
    The Bureau of Primary Health Care's (BPHC's) mission is to increase access to comprehensive primary and preventive health care and to improve the health status of underserved and vulnerable populations. Through publications and State-based cooperative agreements, the BPHC promotes school health centers as an effective way to improve access to health services for vulnerable children and adolescents.
Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities

http://www.bphc.hrsa.dhhs.gov/hshc/hshcl.htm

Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities is a community-based, prevention-focused program established by the BPHC in coordination with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Projects funded through this program work to reduce the critical health problems of school-age children and youth, including those with special health care needs, by improving accessibility and increasing utilization of comprehensive health and health-related services.

Maternal and Child Health Bureau

http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/

The Maternal and Child Health Bureau provides grants to agencies to build the Nation's infrastructure for the delivery of health care services to mothers and children. A special focus is on serving low-income and isolated populations who otherwise would have limited access to care.

Office of Minority Health

http://www.omhrc.gov

The Office of Minority Health (OMH) provides leadership for programs and activities that address the special health needs of racial and ethnic minorities. The OMH assists communities in addressing issues such as access to affordable health care, cultural barriers to care, and culturally competent approaches to improving health service delivery.

National Institutes of Health

http://www.nih.gov

The National Institutes of Health conduct and support research to acquire new knowledge to help prevent, detect, diagnose, and treat disease and disability.
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

http://www.nichd.nih.gov

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) conducts research on human development as it relates to the health of children, adults, families, and communities. The NICHD research programs focus on maternal and child health, reproduction and contraception, and rehabilitation for individuals with physical disabilities.

National Institute of Mental Health

http://www.nimh.nih.gov

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) conducts and supports research on mental illness and mental health, including studies of the brain, behavior, and mental health services. The NIMH's goals are to improve the mental health of the American people; foster better understanding of the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of those with mental and brain disorders; and prevent mental illness.

National Institute on Drug Abuse

http://www.nida.nih.gov

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), through grants to institutions and through NIDA's Addiction Research Center, conducts research to improve the understanding, treatment, and prevention of drug abuse and addiction.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

http://www.samhsa.gov

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) mission is to improve the quality of prevention, early intervention, treatment, and rehabilitation services for substance abuse and mental illnesses, including co-occurring disorders.

Center for Mental Health Services

http://www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs

The Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) leads national efforts to demonstrate, evaluate, and disseminate service delivery models for promoting mental health, preventing the development or worsening of
mental illness, and treating mental illness among children, youth, and adults.

- **Center for Substance Abuse Prevention**
  
  [http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

  The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) promotes the development of comprehensive prevention and intervention systems to reduce or eliminate the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

- **Center for Substance Abuse Treatment**
  

  The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's (CSAT's) programs focus on ways to improve and expand treatment and recovery programs for people who abuse alcohol and drugs. CSAT initiatives promote the development of community-based, coordinated systems providing comprehensive treatment services.

- **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation**
  
  [http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov](http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov)

  The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) on policy development issues and is responsible for major activities in the areas of legislative and budget development, strategic planning, policy research and evaluation, and economic analysis. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation works closely with the DHHS operating divisions in developing policies and planning policy research, evaluations, and data collection in support of broad DHHS and Administration initiatives.

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**


- **Office of Community Viability**

  The Office of Community Viability assists communities in developing economically and socially viable neighborhoods. The Office administers programs based on the principle that residents know best how to improve their communities and that each community must plan for its own revitalization and growth. To that end, the Office offers technical assistance and information services and administers programs that empower community residents to participate in community planning and development.
• **Office of Native American Programs**
  
  http://www.codetalk.fed.us

  The Office of Native American Programs provides a range of programs for Native American and Native Alaskan youth to help them move toward self-sufficiency.

• **Office of Public and Indian Housing**
  
  http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/index.cfm

  The Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) provides Federal assistance for local public housing agencies and Indian housing authorities. The PIH assists in the planning, development, modernization, and management of low-income housing. A priority of the PIH is promoting self-sufficiency among residents and reducing dependence on public assistance, including providing job training and apprenticeship programs for young people living in assisted-housing communities.

• **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development**
  
  http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/about/cpd_programs.cfm

  The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development awards grants to State and local governments to help them carry out programs that promote the development of viable urban communities. The Office has a number of programs that provide housing and supportive services to various populations, including those affected by substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, physical disability, and homelessness.

  o **Office of Economic Development, Community and Economic Development Services Youth Build Division**

    http://www.hud.gov/progdesc/youthb.cfm

    The Office of Economic Development, Community and Economic Development Services administers the Youth Build program. Youth Build provides opportunities for youth in economically disadvantaged circumstances to obtain employment training and education through work experience in low-income housing construction or rehabilitation.

  o **Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs**

    The Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs provides financial support to projects that involve the acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, and operation of housing facilities, including grants for programs to reduce homelessness.
U.S. Department of Justice

http://www.usdoi.gov

- Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
  http://www.usdoi.gov/cops/home.htm

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) puts additional police officers on the streets and promotes community policing strategies to help reduce crime. Through community policing, citizens work with the police to design lasting solutions to community problems.

The COPS Youth Firearms Violence Initiative supports innovative community policing approaches to fighting firearms violence among young people.

- Office of Justice Programs
  http://www.ojp.usdoi.gov

The Office of Justice Programs works with Federal, State, and local agencies to develop, operate, and evaluate criminal and juvenile justice programs. The Office strives to make the Nation's criminal and juvenile justice systems more effective.

  o Bureau of Justice Assistance
    www.ojp.usdoi.gov/BJA

  The Bureau of Justice Assistance provides training and technical assistance and establishes demonstration programs to assist State and local governments in reducing crime, enforcing drug laws, and improving the functioning of the criminal justice system. Areas of emphasis include community-based prevention strategies and antidrug and violent crime reduction activities.

  o National Institute of Justice
    www.ojp.usdoi.gov/nij

  The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsors research on crime and criminal justice and evaluates programs designed to reduce crime. In addition, the NIJ provides training and technical assistance for criminal justice agencies.

  o Office for Victims of Crime
    http://www.ojp.usdoi.gov/ovc

  The Office for Victims of Crime provides funding for victim services, supports training for professionals who work with crime victims, and develops programs to enhance victims' rights and services.
o **Violence Against Women Office**

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo

The Violence Against Women Office (VAWO), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, is dedicated to enhancing victim safety and ensuring offender accountability by supporting policies, protocols, and projects that call for zero tolerance of all forms of violence against women. VAWO administers one formula and four discretionary grant programs authorized by the Violence Against Women Act. Its homepage contains summaries of VAWO programs and current initiatives, information on how to apply for funding, reports and publications, and news from the VAWO office.

o **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides direction, coordination, and resources to prevent, treat, and control juvenile delinquency. The OJJDP also strives to improve the effectiveness and fairness of the juvenile justice system and to address the problem of missing and exploited children.

**U.S. Department of Labor**

http://www.dol.gov

- **Office of the Deputy Secretary**
  - **Employment and Training Administration**

  http://www.doleta.gov

The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) seeks to ensure that workers, employers, students, and those seeking work have access to employment information, services, and training. The ETA accomplishes this goal by supporting the development of local markets to provide such resources.

The ETA administers the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which awards grants to provide job training, job search assistance, and counseling for economically disadvantaged adults and youth, dislocated workers, and others who face significant employment barriers. The JTPA, which became effective on October 1, 1983, seeks to move jobless individuals into permanent, self-sustaining employment.
Office of Job Training Programs

The Office of Job Training Programs develops and issues Federal policies and procedures pertaining to the operation of the JTPA.

- Office of Job Corps
  
  [Website]

  The Office of Job Corps administers the Job Corps, a residential educational and vocational training program for unemployed and undereducated youth. Most Job Corps centers are operated through contracts with private industry and nonprofit organizations. Through an interagency agreement, however, 30 Job Corps centers (called Civilian Conservation Centers) are operated by the U.S. Forest Service (U.S. Department of Agriculture) and the National Park Service (U.S. Department of the Interior).

- Office of National Programs
  Division of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs
  
  [Website]

  The Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs help combat chronic unemployment, underemployment, and substandard living conditions among migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families. These programs help farmworkers who seek alternative job opportunities to secure stable employment at an income above the poverty level. In addition, the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs are designed to improve the living standard of those who remain in the agricultural labor force.

- Office of National Programs
  Division of Indian & Native American Programs
  
  [Website]

  The Native American Programs help eligible individuals prepare for and hold productive jobs by offering job training, job referrals, counseling, and other employment-related services, such as child care, transportation, and training allowances.

U.S. Department of the Interior

[Website]
• **Bureau of Indian Affairs**

The mission of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is to enhance the quality of life and economic opportunities of Indian tribes and Alaskan Natives and to protect and improve the trust assets of these groups. The BIA provides a range of services to Indian tribes and Alaskan Natives, including law enforcement, education, leasing of land, business loan opportunities, housing improvements, and social services. Through its child protection coordinator, the BIA facilitates interdisciplinary responses to issues of child abuse and neglect and coordinates programs addressing child abuse among BIA's offices and divisions.

  o **Office of Indian Education Programs**

    [http://www.oiep.bia.edu](http://www.oiep.bia.edu)

    The Office of Indian Education Programs' goal is to raise educational achievements of Native American students in Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded schools by the year 2000 through the "Indian America 2000 Goals." To that end, the Office's Branch of Elementary and Secondary Education administers a range of programs that provide supportive services to Native American students and their families.

  o **Office of Tribal Services**

    **Division of Social Services**

    The Division of Social Services helps provide child protective services to Native American families living on reservations.

    • **Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention**

    The Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention coordinates and oversees Bureau of Indian Affairs programs concerned with alcohol and drug use and abuse.

  o **Office of Tribal Services**

    **Tribal Government Services**

    **Division of Law Enforcement and Judicial Services**

    The Division of Law Enforcement and Judicial Services is responsible for protecting life, developing methods and expertise for conducting successful conflict resolution and criminal investigations, and implementing legally sanctioned remedial actions, detention, and rehabilitation. The Division also assists tribal governments in establishing and maintaining impartial and fair judicial systems while ensuring that these systems keep pace with legal, social, political, demographic, and technological developments.
The National Park Service (NPS) is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural resources of the Nation's parklands.

- **Park Operations and Education**
  - **Youth Activities Office**

  Through an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor, the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service (U.S. Department of Agriculture) operate 30 Job Corps Centers. The Job Corps, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, is a residential education and training program for unemployed and undereducated youth. When operated by either the National Park Service or the U.S. Forest Service, Job Corps centers are called Civilian Conservation Centers.

  In addition, the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service jointly oversee the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a summer employment program for young people. In the YCC, youth work, learn, and earn pay by doing projects that help conserve natural resources within the United States.

U.S. Department of the Treasury

- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms**

  The mission of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) is to reduce the criminal use of firearms and misuse of explosives; to ensure the collection of all alcohol, tobacco, and firearms tax revenues; to stop prohibited trade practices in the alcoholic beverage industry; to investigate individuals who use firearms in illegal narcotics activities; and to suppress the illicit manufacture and sale of non-tax-paid alcoholic beverages.

  The ATF administers Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.), a structured, school-based program that helps children resolve conflicts without violence and resist the pressure to join gangs. Through the program, children also learn about the harmful effects of drugs on both the user and the user's family and friends. The G.R.E.A.T. curriculum is taught at the junior high/middle school level by trained, uniformed police officers and Federal agents.
APPENDIX 2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY
One set of recommendations for a national youth policy comes from a model used in Great Britain, as outlined in the Commonwealth Youth Charter (Pittman, Irby, and Ferber 2001, 11). Eight steps are suggested:

1. Formulation, promotion, and implementation of a national youth policy as a framework for planning and action for all agencies and organizations involved in youth development.

2. Formulation and implementation of a national action plan to achieve the national youth policy.

3. Nomination of a lead agency in government, holding responsibility for coordinating youth matters across government.

4. Creation of government machinery to achieve a coordinated and holistic government response to youth development issues.

5. Establishment of consultative and participatory mechanisms with young people.

6. Establishment of a youth affairs collaborative mechanism fulfilling the role of a national youth council.

7. Creation and publication of an annual youth budget to track total government expenditures for youth programs and to finance youth initiatives.

8. Development of capacity building mechanisms for youth serving and development research and professionals.
These steps sound similar to many of the components of the proposed Younger Americans Act. Great Britain followed these steps to develop a national youth policy, but it is too soon to know the results of that effort.

A coalition of worldwide organizations (consisting of the World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations, World Young Women’s Christian Association, World Organization of the Scout Movement, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Award Association) involved in non-formal education of youth argue for a long-term, consensus-based national youth policy that has “an overarching coordination role and gives direction to all policies that directly and indirectly affect young people and their development as members of society” (World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations, World Young Women’s Christian Association, World Organization of the Scout Movement, et al 8). Specifically, they recommend that a national youth policy (in any country) should:

- Be a policy of the State and not merely of a government
- Reflect an integrated, cross-sectoral and coherent approach, and be interdisciplinary, interministerial and multi-departmental
- Be the fruit of multi-party, national consensus, based on a consultation of all concerned, particularly youth
- Be conceived as a long-term strategic instrument and not out of short-term political expediency.
The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY, a non-profit that includes numerous members\(^1\)) also is interested in a holistic, integrated approach to developing all aspects of youth. Their recommendations for the federal government are focused on positive youth development and include (National Collaboration for Youth 2001):

- Establishing a national youth policy modeled generally after the assurances provided older individuals in the Older Americans Act of 1965.

- Enacting the Younger Americans Act as introduced as H.R. 17 in the 107th Congress.

- Providing resources to community youth development programs as an economically sound, front-end investment in youth that will eventually lower public expenditures for incarceration, social support, and welfare payments.

- Providing support for strong local collaborations of community groups, organizations, and centers offering a broad range of developmental programs enabling young people to meet their basic physical and social needs and build the competencies necessary for successful adolescence and adulthood.

- Appropriating significant funds on a stable basis to carry out youth development policies and programs in order to improve positive youth outcomes and reduce risky behaviors.

- Providing incentives for holistic youth development through truly collaborative partnerships between community-based organizations and education systems.

- Allocating research funds to study youth development programs and their outcomes, distributing the results widely.

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Supporting information networks, accessible worldwide, to provide support for youth development professionals and to connect research to practice.

NCY also makes more specific policy recommendations in a number of areas (such as youth employment, pregnancy prevention, juvenile justice, etc.) One of the areas—community service and service learning—is relevant to my focus here, because evidence has shown that such activities build civic engagement among young people.

Specifically related to community service and service learning, the National Collaboration for Youth makes the following recommendations to Congress (National Collaboration for Youth 2001):

- Support successful existing programs and encourage the organization of new programs in local communities, which involve young people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.

- Appropriate funds to better enable national youth-serving organizations to coordinate current service programs provided by their affiliates and to create new ones.

- Reauthorize and expand funding for the National Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

- Fully fund the Corporation for National Service.

- Include a set of pilot or demonstration programs in any national service program.

- Support a national media campaign promoting the importance of youth service to help young people become confident about participating in community service, build public appreciation for their service, and promote youth as partners and resources.

- Ensure the inclusion of the broadest possible spectrum of participants in federally supported state and local service programs, including out-of-school youth, non-college-bound youth and youth from non-needy circumstances.
APPENDIX 3

STATES DEVELOPING INTEGRATED YOUTH POLICIES
COMPILED BY THE FORUM FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT
• **Iowa.** The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD), consisting of members of more than 40 state agencies, community organizations, research institutions and statewide non-governmental organizations, has been working to:

- identify and communicate common definitions, program objectives and desired outcomes for youth development-related programs and services;
- align state program policies, funding and technical assistance resources to better assist local initiatives; and
- find ways to involve youth in state and local planning.

• **Massachusetts.** The Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services created an Office of Youth Development in 1999 to support and establish effective youth development programs at the state and local levels. A statewide Youth Development Advisory Council was formed with more than 25 representatives of government departments and agencies, advocates, community organizations and young people, and formally endorsed a draft Statewide Policy on Youth.

• **Connecticut.** The Connecticut House of Representatives passed a landmark bill in 2000 to create a State Prevention Council to develop a prevention framework for the state, develop and coordinate prevention services and training and identify research-based prevention practices.

• **Kentucky.** The Kentucky Youth Development Partnership has brought together a group of 18 national, state and local youth serving organizations to foster collaboration of youth services at the state and local levels and to promote positive youth development.

• **California.** Shifting the Focus, an interagency collaboration of California state government leaders, represents more than 30 agencies and departments who
recognize the importance of working together to maximize state resources and
effectiveness in preventing crime and violence in California. It is intended to
"shift the focus" from separate programs, each delivering services, often with the
same purpose, to collaboratives that more effectively coordinate and deliver
prevention services.

- **Oregon.** Since the passage in 1999 of SB555, legislation that codified a
  comprehensive, statewide approach to crime prevention, Oregon has been
  working to develop a uniform data system, planning tools and evaluation
  structure. To date, the state has succeeded in developing common planning
  principles, an early childhood interagency team, a juvenile crime prevention
  screening tool, mechanisms to merge reporting processes and methods to
  coordinate data collection and analysis among agencies.

The list goes on and on. At least 20 states have been developing cross-cutting bodies
charged with taking a "big picture" look at young people, and coordinating and aligning
the vast array of policies serving them. Many of these cross-cutting bodies have
significant local representation, with local actors comprising as much as a third of some
collaboratives.

These state-level coordinating entities are increasingly recognized, supported and,
in some cases, sparked by national organizations. The Family and Youth Services Bureau
(FYSB) within the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Governors
Association (NGA) and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) have all
launched broad-based, multi-state, multi-year efforts to help states take action to create
policies and structures to increase the coherence and effectiveness of state youth policy efforts. A total of 17 states are being supported by one or more of these groups.

The structure and authority of these state coordinating bodies varies considerably. They vary in the level of authority they are granted — some have the implicit or explicit support of a cabinet member; others are composed of mid-level officials operating without a clear mandate from above. Some are housed in "neutral" entities such as a governor's office or a nonprofit organization, others are housed within a particular department, executive office or agency.

Despite the variations, they all appear to be moving in similar directions.
APPENDIX 4

WEB SITE RESOURCES

COMPILED BY YOUTH ACTIVISM 2000 PROJECT
GETTING STARTED. The Student Environmental Action Coalition suggests a roadmap for moving from a one-time community service project to a sustained community action campaign.

http://www.seac.org/resources/pickinganissue.shtml

JOINING A TEAM OR BUILDING YOUR OWN. Youth Action Line on our web site runs through the pros and cons of starting an independent youth-led campaign.

http://www.youthactivism.com/content.php?ID=12

DEVELOPING A GAMEPLAN. TakingITGlobal’s 12-page guide outlines step-by-step instructions to develop a preliminary action plan.


CRAFTING A BUDGET. Youth Venture offers seed money up to $1,000 and part of its grant application includes a useful Activity & Budget Timeline.

http://www.youthventure.org

IDENTIFYING ALLIES & ADVERSARIES. Campus Compact’s online help includes handy charts to figure out potential supporters and opponents.

http://www.actionforchange.org/mapping/chart1.html

RESEARCHING SCHOOL POLICY. The Women’s Sports Foundation suggests ways to develop a school report card on Title IX compliance that can be adapted for other advocacy issues.

http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/issues/geena/school/repcard.html

CONDUCTING A COMMUNITY SURVEY. Transforming Communities has bilingual questionnaires focusing on sexual harassment and teen dating violence that can serve as useful examples for other campaigns.

http://www.transformcommunities.org/tctatsite/SpanishSelections.html
FRAMING YOUR MESSAGE. The Frameworks Institute understands the appeal of solving a problem one person at a time but tells how to sell the public on why it’s also important to pursue change in the public policy arena. http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue8framing.shtml

USING TECH TOOLS. NetAction’s Virtual Activist Training Reader covers everything from do’s and don’ts regarding e-mail action alerts to promoting one’s web site. http://www.netaction.org/training/index.html

WRITING LETTERS THAT GET READ. Global Response emphasizes the effectiveness of personal letters to movers and shakers over e-mail communication. http://www.globalresponse.org/letters.html

MEETING LEGISLATORS. YouthNoise’s Change the Rules Toolkit includes specific ways that those not old enough to vote will be taken seriously by politicians. http://www.youthnoise.com/page.php?page_id=251

CONTACTING THE MEDIA. Many sites such as this one link directly to a service that will spew out all the mainstream news media outlets by zip code (as well as lawmakers). http://capwiz.com/vision/dbq/media/

GAINING CREDIBILITY. 20/20 Vision outlines how to conduct a successful meeting with a newspaper editorial board to get a major league endorsement for your campaign. http://www.2020vision.org/resources/r_activists.htm#infeditorials

WRITING GRANTS. The University of Kansas’s Community Tool Box consists of 6,000 pages, including guidance on writing grant proposals (refer to Part L) http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/tools_toc.htm

REGAINING MOMENTUM. Campus Activism lists dozens of resources and this one suggests ways to deal with dull, dysfunctional and demoralizing meetings. http://www.campusactivism.org/uploads/GettingUnstuck-53W.pdf

ROTATING LEADERSHIP. Amnesty International spells out ways to pass the torch by identifying new leaders who will be key to sustaining a local chapter as students graduate. http://www.amnestyusa.org/activist_toolkit/gettingstarted/startstudentgroup.html

FINDING INSPIRATION. The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing reports on youth movements across the country contain clues for agents of change. http://www.fcvo.org/attachments/Papers_no2_v4.qxd.pdf

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APPENDIX 5

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS
Pre-and Post-Survey Questions (among other questions unrelated to civic engagement)

51) Young people should be involved in making public policy.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

52) There are adequate opportunities for me, as a young person, to participate in policy development and community decision making.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

53) I believe I can make a difference by participating in my community.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

54) Being involved in democracy is important.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

55) Voting is important.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
56) I am interested in politics.
☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

57) I have participated in other activities (besides the Youth Advisory Council) that teach me about the community and allow me to participate in public processes.
   a) Never participated in a similar activity
   b) Participated in one or two similar activities, please list by name and/or description:
   ______________________________________________________________
   c) Participated in more than two activities, please list by name and/or description:
   ______________________________________________________________

58) I have participated in the following types of groups/activities. (circle all that apply)
   a) student council  b) school sports  c) school clubs  d) Scouts
   e) church youth groups  f) community sports  g) community clubs  h) volunteering
   i) political campaigns  j) writing to a politician or the newspaper
   k) working on a community project or problem  l) charity fundraising
   m) holding an office in a club or association

59) I follow government and public affairs:
☐ Most of the time
☐ Some of the time
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

60) I vote in local and national elections (or intend to vote if under 18):
☐ Always
☐ Sometimes
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

61) I read the newspaper or watch the news:
☐ Always
☐ Most of the time
☐ Sometimes
☐ Never
62) My experience on the Youth Advisory Council has motivated me to continue to be involved in other community, political and/or public participation activities.

☐ Strongly agree  
☐ Agree  
☐ Somewhat agree  
☐ Neutral  
☐ Somewhat disagree  
☐ Disagree  
☐ Strongly disagree  

Please explain: _________________________________

_______________________________
Longitudinal Alumni Survey Questions (among other questions unrelated to civic engagement)

4) There are adequate opportunities for me to participate in policy development and community decision making.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Neutral
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

5) I believe I can make a difference by participating in my community.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Neutral
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

6) Being involved in democracy is important.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Neutral
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

7) I am interested in politics.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Neutral
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

8) I have participated in other activities (besides the YAC) that teach me about the community and allow me to participate in public processes.
   d) Never participated in a similar activity
   e) Participated in one or two similar activities, please list by name and/or description:

______________________________________________________________

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f) Participated in more than two activities, please list by name and/or description:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9) Since serving on the YAC, I have participated in the following types of groups/activities. (circle all that apply)
   a) campus government   b) school sports   c) school clubs   d) charity fundraising
   e) church/religious groups   f) community sports   g) community clubs   h) volunteering
   i) political campaigns   j) contacting a politician or the media
   k) working on a community project or problem   l) officer in sorority/fraternity
   m) officer in a club or association

10) I follow government and public affairs:
   □ Most of the time
   □ Some of the time
   □ Rarely
   □ Never

11) I vote in local and national elections (or intend to vote if under 18):
   □ Always
   □ Sometimes
   □ Rarely
   □ Never

12) My experience on the YAC has motivated me to continue to be involved in other community, political and/or public participation activities.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Neutral
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree
   Please explain:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX 6

SUMMARY OF SNWA

YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

(FULL REPORTS AVAILABLE AT WWW.H2OUNIVERSITY.ORG)
1999-2000 Youth Advisory Council
The Youth Advisory Council members for 1999-2000 chose to spend the year focusing on the availability of future water resources, and on the water conservation public-outreach campaign. From April through December 1999, the students met approximately twice a month to analyze these issues. The youth council studied, researched and developed the following resource and conservation campaign recommendations:

Water Resource Recommendations
1. Reallocate the Colorado River
2. Explore the idea of water exchanges with Colorado River Basin states
3. Continue SNWA efforts related to legalizing interstate transfers and marketing
4. Form a seven-state youth commission

Conservation Recommendations
1. Make television commercials more realistic
2. Provide more motivation for viewers to conserve by further emphasizing that saving water equates to saving money
3. Highlight other conservation methods in addition to lawn watering
4. Target conservation messages to specific audiences at appropriate times
5. Use Deputy Drip only for age-appropriate audiences
6. Avoid using signs that send an incomplete message

In addition to their recommendations about conservation, the students actually wrote and produced two public service announcements that aired on TV during the summer of 2000 and earned an Electronic Media Award for their work.

2000-2001 Youth Advisory Council
The members for 2000-2001 addressed two topics during their one-year tenure. The first was urban runoff as it relates to the Las Vegas Wash. The second topic they addressed was the issue of water taste.

On January 18, 2001, the youth council presented their recommendations regarding urban runoff and water taste to the SNWA Board of Directors for approval. Following is a summary of their recommendations:

Urban Runoff- Reduce contaminated runoff at its source: neighborhoods in every part of the valley. To achieve this goal, the council urged SNWA to develop a public outreach program that would educate residents about urban runoff and its causes; the students created several print ads with this message (see below).
They also recommended paint recycling centers, establishing a drop-off and/or pick-up program for used oil and antifreeze, and environmentally friendly car-washing methods.

Water Taste- In an informal study, the council found that the longer people have resided in Las Vegas, the less likely they are to be dissatisfied with the taste of the tap water. They suggested that taste may not be as much of an issue as once thought.

In order to accurately determine how the public feels about the options available to treat drinking water, the council recommended a statistically valid taste survey. The youth group also encouraged further consumer education to rehabilitate tap water's image.

2001-2002 Youth Advisory Council
This Youth Advisory Council agreed that one of the most important conservation initiatives is encouraging Las Vegas Valley residents to use xeriscape in their landscapes instead of installing or maintaining all-grass yards.

They developed this problem statement:
How can we increase the awareness and use of xeriscaping in the Las Vegas Valley to decrease water and energy consumption?

This group wanted to do more than develop policy recommendations — they made this a hands-on project by creating a model xeriscape demonstration garden at Estes McDoniel Elementary School in Henderson.

The group worked with landscape architects to design the water-efficient garden. The students then planted the garden on October 23, 2001, replacing 1,800 square feet of grass with desert landscaping. The garden includes a vegetable garden, plant-covered trellis, dry riverbed and a mini-amphitheater. Many local organizations and individuals donated expertise and materials for the project, which is expected to save nearly 200,000 gallons of water a year.

2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council
The 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council (YAC) made it their goal to reduce outdoor water use 30 percent by 2010. The YAC recognized that a majority of the valley's drinking water is used on outdoor landscaping, and much of that water is lost to waste.
The students brainstormed ways to target the largest residential users of water in the valley. They coordinated a special event, called "Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council," to educate local residents about outdoor conservation. The YAC also set up a booth at the 2002 Day with the Experts at the Gardens at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve. They shared water conservation information and performed a skit about the misconceptions of xeriscape.

The students learned that their target audience was difficult to reach, even with tempting raffle prizes. According to their report to the SNWA Board of Directors, high-water-users often have unique characteristics and are disengaged when it comes to water issues. The 2002-2003 council reported they found it difficult to reach their target audience of high-water users, and they recommended the Water Authority increase efforts to reach people in high-water-use communities.

2003-2004 Youth Advisory Council
The 5th Youth Advisory Council (YAC) developed the following problem statement: How can we inform new home buyers and developers about consumptive and non-consumptive water usage and the benefits of desert landscaping in Southern Nevada?

To address their problem statement and help residents to be water smart from the start, the YAC partnered with Pulte Homes. They designed a water smart home with state of the art water efficient appliances and fixtures inside the house, as well as water smart landscaping for the front and back yards. The home, built in Summerlin's Escala community, is expected to save approximately 115,000 gallons of water each year. The students actually researched the indoor features (including dual flush toilets and motion activated faucets in the bathroom, as well as a foot pedal sink in the kitchen) and worked with a landscape architect to design and install the lush desert landscape. They created informational signage for inside and outside the home, as well as a full-color handout, so visitors to the water smart home can understand its unique features. All of the water smart features are available as options to buyers; additionally, homeowners can retrofit their existing homes with the water smart features developed by the students. The 2003-2004 Youth Advisory Council recommended to the SNWA Board of Directors that this pilot water smart home project be extended throughout the community to become an official "Water Smart Home" certification program, with criteria and logo designations along the scope of the Energy Star program.
APPENDIX 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES
FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS
United Way identified twelve necessary elements of youth involvement to ensure young people are respected and meaningfully engaged when involved with a community organization, particularly when serving on governing boards of non-profit organizations (7-18):

1. Equal selection process (for youth and their adult partners)
2. Regard and respect for each individual
3. Orientation and training
4. Full voting rights (when serving on an adult board)
5. Equal terms and benefits (for youth and adults)
6. Opportunities to assume visible leadership roles
7. Realistic expectations (from sponsoring organization and adult partners)
8. Access to transportation
9. Accessible meeting places and times
10. Access to necessary resources (such as office supplies and communication tools)
11. Participatory and interactive meetings
12. Communication with parents and schools

Other researchers (Zeldin et al 9-10) studied a variety of youth participation programs and identified six conditions as being most likely to facilitate positive outcomes when engaging youth through a community organization.

1. The top decision making body in the organization needs to be committed to youth governance and youth-adult partnerships, and must change their ways of operating accordingly.
2. Organizational change is facilitated by an adult visionary leader, one with institutional power and authority, to strongly advocate for youth decision making.

3. The youth involvement initiative takes on greater power and influence as young people begin to organize and demand increasing participation in governance.

4. Adult views about young people’s participation are positively affected when:
   a. Youth participation is oriented toward meaningful outcomes, and is not symbolic or tokenistic.
   b. Young people successfully fill typically adult roles, such as facilitating a meeting.
   c. Young people are engaged in community action with real payoffs for community residents.

5. Organizational (or community) change occurs most rapidly when adults perceive the young people as effective decision makers (which is most likely when the young people are carefully selected and prepared for decision-making experiences).

6. Organizations typically begin youth engagement programs by involving older youth (average 18 years), who are more developed mentally, socially and intellectually. As the organization’s comfort level with youth participation increases, younger adolescents are gradually included.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which has a well-established Youth Advisory Board charged with distributing approximately $200,000 in grant funds each year, has identified several keys to success. The Foundation believes a youth advisory board should (www.emkf.org):

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- Be made up of youth, with adult advisors
- Look like the community it serves (diversity)
- Have access to training in leadership and grantmaking
- Have decision-making authority
- Have a voice among other young people
- Have respect and trust from its parent organization

The Foundation also provides guidelines for adults in organizations working with youth (www.emkf.org):

- Relinquish some adult power to youth
- Share responsibility and decision making with youth
- Leave behind stereotypes of youth behaviors and attitudes
- Become more open and willing to listen to new ideas
- Resist making assumptions about the abilities of youth
- Take risks and show confidence in young people's capabilities
- Define a role for youth, provide appropriate training and offer support
- Expect great results.

Successful youth engagement programs often require organizational resources, as well as changes in mindset and procedures, but the benefits are tremendous and organizations that have made the commitment to engage youth have had such positive experiences that they recommend it wholeheartedly. According to the California Adolescent Health Collaborative, “Although good intentions, enthusiasm and commitment can go a long way to successfully involving youth in public policy, careful considerations should be given to a number of issues to ensure that the experience is
positive and productive for everyone involved” (Clayton et al 7). The Collaborative suggests nine areas in which an organization should focus its planning efforts to develop a successful process (Clayton et al 7-10). The areas are topics for discussion within the sponsoring organization rather than specific recommendations.

1. Attitudes and interaction (ensuring they are positive for youth and adults)
2. Recruitment and representation
3. Roles and structure (formal lines of authority, or lack thereof, between youth and adults)
4. Training (for youth and adults)
5. Support (from adult partner/organizational structure)
6. Public relations
7. Resources (commitment by sponsoring organization)
8. Logistics (including meeting times and transportation)
9. Time (potential conflicts with school commitments, etc.)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the National League of Cities (NLC) is interested in promoting youth involvement at the municipal level. NLC provides the following tips to help municipalities promote youth participation (5):

- Work to overcome preconceptions and misconceptions
- Orient and meet regularly with young leaders
- Make meetings interactive
- Allow young people to lead
- Encourage youth to network with their peers
- Respect young people’s needs
• Institutionalize young people’s involvement.

NLC suggests these tips are applicable for several youth engagement formats, including youth summits, youth advisory boards, and special events.
These indicators were developed through a systematic process by the research team that created *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. The team conducted a series of focus groups with young people from around the country and surveyed a nationally representative sample of both youth and adults. The resulting indicators are useful in identifying a range of civic engagement activities.

If you are interested in using the indicators for assessment or evaluation purposes, please read the notes at the bottom of this page. Feel free to contact CIRCLE for more information or advice about additional measures of youth civic engagement.

- **Civic Indicators**
- **Electoral Indicators**
- **Indicators of Political Voice**
- **Indicators of Attentiveness (News/Current Affairs)**
- **Notes on Using the Indicators for Assessment/Evaluation**

**Civic Indicators**

- Community problem solving: Working together informally with someone or some group to solve a community problem
- Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization: Working in some way to help others for no pay (includes volunteering for an environmental organization; a civic/community organization, a social services organization to help the poor, elderly, or homeless; a hospital; or an organization involved with youth, children, or education)
- Active membership in a group or association: Belonging to and actively participating in (not just donating money) groups or associations, either locally or nationally
- Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride: Personally walking, running, or bicycling for a charitable cause (does not include sponsoring or giving money for this type of event)
- Other fund raising for charity: Helping raise money for a charitable cause

**Electoral Indicators**

- Regular voting: Voting regularly in both local and national elections
- Persuading others: Talking to others when there is an election taking place to try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates
- Displaying buttons, signs, stickers: For a candidate, political party, or political organization
- Campaign contributions: Contributing money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?
- Volunteering for candidates or political organizations
Indicators of Political Voice

- Contacting officials:
  Contacting or visiting a public official, at any level of government, to ask for assistance or to express an opinion
- Contacting the print media:
  Contacting a newspaper or magazine to express an opinion on an issue
- Contacting the broadcast media:
  Calling in to a radio or television talk show to express an opinion on a political issue, even if it is not aired
- Protesting:
  Taking part in a protest, march, or demonstration
- E-mail petitions:
  Signing an e-mail petition
- Written petitions:
  Signing a written petition about a political or social issue
- Boycotting:
  Not buying something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because of disapproval of the company that produces it
- Buycotting:
  Buying a certain product or service because of approval of the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it
- Canvassing:
  Having done some work as a canvasser going door to door for a political or social group or candidate.

Indicators of Attentiveness

- Following government & public affairs most of the time
- Talking often about current events with friends or family
- Talking often about politics or government
- Regularly reading the newspaper:
  "Regularly" means at least a few times a week
- Reading a news magazine with regularity
- Watching the news on television
- Listening to news on the radio
- Regularly reading news on the Internet

Using the Indicators for Assessment/Evaluation

The indicators can be used in two ways to measure civic engagement for a group. First, they can be used to compare the pattern of civic engagement in a group of people to the pattern of civic engagement found nationally. Second, these indicators can be used to measure changes in civic engagement after a group has been exposed to a program or other treatment.
Several cautions should be noted about using the indicators to measure the effectiveness of a youth program, an organization, or a specific curriculum, or just to compare a group to the levels of civic engagement observed nationally:

- Many programs that are valuable to youth may not spark an immediate change in these indicators, particularly if the program is run over a short period of time or is not very intensive. In such a case, giving young people the indicators in the form of a pre-and post-test may not always yield results, and most likely will not capture subtle changes. The most appropriate measures may be more specific to the content of a project. For example, students in an environmental service-learning program should learn about the particular ecosystem in which they are working. The above indicators will not reflect changes in environmental knowledge. Only if the project is intense or lasts for a considerable period of time would we anticipate changes in the civic indicators listed above.

- All of the indicators measure behavior that can be quantified. Some types of civic values, motives, and behaviors may be better assessed through qualitative measures such as open-ended interviews where young people can describe their activities and intentions. If you are using the indicators to assess civic engagement in an organization or program, adding qualitative methods to your evaluation will give a richer picture of your program and the youth involved.

- The indicators were developed from a national sample, and as a result, reflect civic actions that can be measured on a national scale, but may not always be community specific. For instance, the national sample had a low representation of Native American youth. Consequently, the indicators do not include civic activities that may be common on a reservation or in a tribal community. Similarly, if you are working with extremely engaged youth, their civic behaviors may not be reflected in the indicators. Please adapt the indicators to fit your needs, and add new indicators to the list. Supplement any evaluations with additional measures and other types of data - particularly qualitative data that will give you a better idea of the uniqueness of your program and the young people you work with.
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