



# Improving Communities through Youth Civic Engagement in Afterschool Settings

August 2025



**CYESS**

Collective for Youth Empowerment in STEM & Society  
An Initiative of the Afterschool Alliance



**Afterschool Alliance**

## ABOUT CYESS

CYESS, a project of the Afterschool Alliance, aims to expand opportunities for young people to use STEM skills to tackle community challenges and enact systemic change. We bring together people and organizations to integrate STEM, civic engagement, and youth leadership in afterschool and out-of-school time programs.



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## ABOUT THE AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

The Alliance works to ensure that all youth have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs by engaging public will to increase public and private investment in afterschool program initiatives at the national, state, and local levels.



**Afterschool Alliance**

AFTERSCHOOL FOR ALL

## ABOUT CIRCLE

CIRCLE, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States.



TISCH COLLEGE OF CIVIC LIFE

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## INTRODUCTION

Next year will mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the formation of one of the oldest democracies in the world. Civic engagement has long been a cornerstone of democracy in the United States, and youth civic engagement is critical to sustaining that democracy. The U.S., however, is facing a civic engagement predicament, particularly with the nation's young people. The country is falling short in offering settings that are vital for youth engagement, such as community spaces where youth can exercise their right to be heard, and educational spaces like the classroom where students should be learning the goals and structures of democracy to become engaged and informed.<sup>1,2</sup>

Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to support and strengthen youth civic engagement by providing young people with valuable hands-on experiences that help them become informed, involved, and engaged citizens. Many afterschool programs have long supported community-centered and youth-driven approaches to programming. The increasing attention to youth voice in afterschool programs is accelerating this approach to offer more youth-led experiences that center their interests, including tackling challenges in their local communities.



**Afterschool programs offer structured activities for children and teens in the hours after school ends, on the weekends, and during the summer.** They are rooted in principles of positive youth development and offer supportive environments for young people to engage with each other, be mentored by caring adults, and learn a variety of skills. Programs look different for youth at different ages, especially for teens, who have a diverse range of priorities. Therefore we take an expansive view of afterschool programs to include all out-of-school-time programs that are intentionally meeting the developmental needs of young people.

**Civic engagement** can be broadly defined as individuals and communities coming together to solve problems of public concern. This includes political activities (e.g., voting, campaigning, signing petitions, and protests) and non-political activities (e.g., volunteering, donating money, neighborhood cleaning, and so on). **Youth civic engagement** encompasses any individual or collective action young people in the community take to solve public issues at the local, state, and national levels.



Photo credit: Vermont Afterschool

## BRIDGING THE CIVIC OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people need spaces where they can translate their belief in their individual and collective efficacy into applied, real-world settings. The majority of young people believe they have the power to make change (76%), and even more (83%) believe they can do so by working with other generations. However, most young people do not feel well-informed or well-qualified to participate civically or politically. Only half of youth say they are “as well-informed as most people,” and a smaller percentage (40%) say they feel well-qualified to participate in politics.<sup>3</sup>

### High School Students Report a Lack of Civic Exposure and Sense of Belonging

A recent post-2024 election survey of young people aged 18-34 showed many students are not enjoying a civic and democratic school climate in high school, particularly students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> The research also highlighted a strong positive association between school climate and youth political efficacy (even after controlling for socioeconomic status, race, gender, and sexuality). This association was even stronger for “collective efficacy,” where young people who experienced a strong democratic school culture were much more likely to say they can work together to solve problems and effect change in their community. Additionally, young people who felt a sense of belonging in high school were more likely to value civic participation including voting in local (58% vs 42%) and national elections (66% vs 50%), volunteering or donating to charities (38% vs 30%), and participating in local civic organizations (26% vs 19%). However, less than half the youth surveyed (48%) said they felt a sense of belonging in high school, where they felt a “part of a community where people cared about each other.”

#### Many Youth Are Not Experiencing a Civic and Democratic School Climate in High School

The percentage of young people, ages 18-34, who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement about their experiences in high school.

In general, students could disagree with teachers, if they were respectful

59%

In general, students were encouraged to express opinions

57%

Students felt like they were part of a community where people cared about each other

48%

During experiences in class, in student groups, or with school leaders, I felt like my voice and opinions mattered

45%

Students had meaningful input in decision-making at my high school

33%

**CIRCLE** Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE

Source: CIRCLE Post-2024 Election Youth Poll



**Young people need spaces where they feel like they belong and have the power to change things for themselves and their community. Afterschool spaces can play an important role in bridging this gap by working with schools and communities.**



Photo credit: trubel&co



## Youth Voter Turnout Dipped in 2024

One measure of civic engagement and youth efficacy is how many youth voters (defined here as ages 18-29) show up at the ballot box during elections. Youth voter turnout hit a record high in 2020, when 50% of youth who were eligible to vote did so nationally, and has since fallen to 47% in 2024.<sup>5</sup> Research also shows that youth living in communities with supportive infrastructure and outreach to youth are more likely to vote.<sup>6</sup> However, 60% of youth in rural areas and one-third of suburban/urban youth live in “Civic Deserts”—“places where they perceive a lack of resources and opportunities for engagement through traditional community institutions and organizations.”<sup>7</sup> Community-based organizations and youth-serving organizations that work in afterschool spaces are critically important for all young people, but even more so for youth living in such civic deserts.

## Young People Need an Ecosystem for Civic Engagement

CIRCLE’s research shows that young people need an ecosystem for civic and community engagement<sup>8</sup> that should provide:

- 1 **Access and exposure through civic learning from schools,** afterschool programs, family and communities,
- 2 **Supportive civic infrastructure** that helps youth grow into agentic citizens, such as through local community-based organizations and youth-led initiatives; election campaigns’ outreach to young people, and
- 3 **A culture where youth feel like they belong in decision making** and where youth voice is developed and championed, such as through student voice and school culture; youth in local government or school decision-making initiatives like participatory budgeting, and community and family empowerment programs that develop youth confidence and efficacy in engagement.



**Afterschool programs offer settings for youth to define and lead community-centered projects** that utilize a broad range of knowledge and skills, including STEM, to creatively solve problems and spark community or global change.



## BENEFITS AND IMPACTS OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS' ROLE

There are many well-documented benefits to engaging youth in civic engagement activities. Examples and research highlight the range of benefits to young people such as better academic performance, improved behavior, stronger community connections, and overall well-being.<sup>9</sup> Long-term, civically engaged youth are more likely to remain active as adults, achieve higher levels of education and income, report greater life satisfaction, and are less likely to be arrested.<sup>10</sup> Developing essential civic skills, such as building logical arguments using evidence, is associated with healthier communication and reduced verbal aggression.<sup>11</sup> Research shows that civic-related activities can decrease risky behaviors such as drug use and unsafe sex<sup>12</sup> and foster stronger social bonds, especially in faith-based communities.<sup>13</sup> Research also shows that when youth have community assets and strong connections, the link between youth mental health and civic engagement is positive.<sup>14</sup>

### Civic Learning and Academic Success

Civic skills are not only important for democratic participation but also strongly connected to academic success.<sup>15</sup> Schools that excel in supporting students from historically marginalized backgrounds often treat civic development as equally important as college and career readiness, emphasizing critical thinking, pluralism, and community involvement.<sup>16</sup> Other research highlights that engaging in structured civic learning, such as debate or other extracurricular activities, promotes educational persistence, lower disciplinary rates, and higher academic achievement scores.<sup>17,18,19</sup>



**These benefits (e.g., academic success, community involvement, and overall well-being) are also the same benefits seen for youth participating in afterschool programs.**

The afterschool field is thus an essential partner in ensuring that all children can participate in immersive, relevant, and hands-on civic engagement opportunities.

A study of students involved in afterschool programming with civics and leadership components found that students developed agency, organizational skills, responsibility, persistence, strategic thinking, and the ability to apply these skills to other areas of their lives.<sup>20</sup> A longitudinal study that followed a large sample of young people for 26 years recently reported that those who participated in afterschool programs were more likely to graduate and pursue higher education, earned higher incomes and secured better jobs, and were more likely to be engaged in their communities as adults.<sup>21</sup>

### Afterschool benefits kids for life

Kids who participate in afterschool programs benefit into adulthood. They are **STRONGER**:



## Local Community Benefits

Beyond impacting youth themselves, programs that engage youth civically with issues that matter to them have the potential to create positive community-level changes. Research is documenting a growing number of youth-serving programs that engage young people in their communities by encouraging them to use their imagination to solve problems and spark positive changes. For example, Taylor & Hall<sup>22</sup> describe teens in a bike-building and riding workshop who learned spatial literacy through counter-mapping—creating alternative maps that reveal overlooked community issues. This led them to critique their neighborhood’s design and imagine better ways to move and live. Other youth-led projects include: middle schoolers in rural Colorado reducing wildfire risks and building an education and awareness campaign<sup>23</sup>; students restoring oyster habitats in New York Harbor<sup>24</sup>; teens reviving an abandoned garden to raise environmental awareness and inspire family action<sup>25</sup>; and students increasing concern and policy support for marine debris among local voters and officials in North Carolina.<sup>26</sup>

These examples of youth-led initiatives demonstrate the significant role that civically engaged youth can play in fostering positive community-level change. These studies collectively emphasize the value of supporting and cultivating programs that enable youth to become active problem-solvers and catalysts for positive change within their communities.

## Youth Spotlight

### Lucia, Age 17

#### Tackling Social Isolation and Mental Health Issues in her Community

**How I’m leading change:** “As Co-Founder and Chief Program Officer of BridGEN, I lead a youth-driven initiative tackling two interwoven issues in my community: social isolation among elders and mental health challenges in digitally saturated youth. Through weekly intergenerational workshops blending digital literacy, art, music, and storytelling at local senior centers, we create screen-free spaces where empathy thrives. Elders rediscover joy and purpose through mentorship, while teens gain resilience from lived wisdom. In a fragmented world, BridGEN is built on a simple truth: connection is the cure for loneliness. I’ve seen shy teens sing with elders whose eyes light up and watched tech tutorials transform into trust. These small, sacred moments taught me that empathy is scalable - we build more than relationships, but a compassionate, inclusive, and sustainable future.”



**How afterschool programs can support youth civic engagement:** “Provide community engagement opportunities and connect like-minded youth to have a strong roster and network so they can work together and have a bigger impact together.”



## Workforce Development

Civic skills not only support youth well-being and community impact, but they are also closely linked to career readiness. These skills include communication, self-management, critical thinking, and problem-solving, all of which are important in both civic and professional settings.<sup>27,28</sup> Research shows that these so-called “soft skills” can be just as important as academic or technical abilities in predicting employment and earnings, among other positive outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

Programs like youth councils and advocacy projects help young people build leadership, collaboration, and civil discourse—skills highly valued in today’s workforce.<sup>30</sup> Flanagan & Levine<sup>31</sup> even suggest that civic engagement helps young people transition into adulthood by supporting identity development and personal growth. Altogether, the evidence shows that developing civic skills not only benefits communities but also prepares youth for long-term success in work and life.

## CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: BRIDGING K-12 STUDENT PROGRAMS AND THE AFTERSCHOOL SPACE

Many programs and initiatives in civic and democratic education work with students and teachers to bridge knowledge and awareness in the classroom to student voice and informed action out of school. Some excellent initiatives include **Facing History and Ourselves’ Student Leadership Group**, a civic engagement leadership program that centers student leadership development through exploring civic identity and civic efficacy in their communities. **Generation Citizen** provides community-based civics curricula to middle and high schools, engaging students in their communities. **The Democratic Knowledge Project** co-designs high-quality curricula in partnership with K-16 schools, developing a deep and rigorous understanding of civic and democratic education. **iCivics** is a pioneer in developing interactive games that empower students, teachers, and policymakers to invest in civics. **Mikva Challenge** empowers youth voice and leadership at the grassroots level through programs like the *Soapbox Challenge*.

These examples highlight effective programs that empower student voice and awareness. However, even when these initiatives engage with communities, they rarely form intentional partnerships with afterschool programs or activities. While K-12 civics education and afterschool programs often operate separately, many schools and afterschool providers are now actively seeking to bridge this divide in order to build a more robust ecosystem for youth civic participation.





## Progression of Civic Learning Frameworks

2003

The **Civic Mission of Schools** is a seminal report that shifted the lens to how schools can and should focus on civic education and outlined the six promising approaches to civic education.

2011

**Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools** report made a strong case for civic learning and its benefits, outlining six proven practices that highlight comprehensive civic learning through extracurricular activities, service-learning, and community involvement.

2013

**College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards** emphasized inquiry-based learning for K-12 civics.

2021

**Educating for American Democracy (EAD) Roadmap** provides a flexible, inquiry-based framework designed to guide states, local school districts, and educators in transforming how they teach civics and history.

## Educating for American Democracy (EAD): Seven Themes

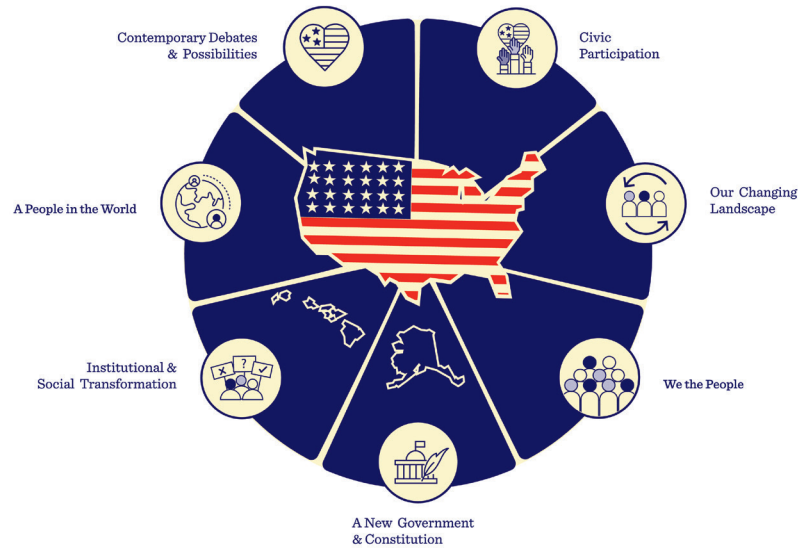


Photo credit: Educating for American Democracy Initiative

## Spotlight on Illinois Civics Hub and Democracy Schools

A pioneering civic and democratic learning school-wide model that embodies the research and evidence in high-quality civic education cited above is Illinois Democracy Schools (IDS), housed at the Illinois Civics Hub. It spans a network of 84 schools and more than 100,000 students. Even though this is a school-wide and school-based model of democratic and civic learning, it is a model that has demonstrated how civic learning can expand beyond just social studies and history classrooms to involve stakeholders both in and out of school. This includes not just the educators (teachers, coaches, librarians, school counselors) and school leadership, but also directly involves students in decision-making and governance as well as communities, families, and caregivers.

**“When we connect the classroom to the afterschool world, we create spaces where young people don’t just learn about democracy—they live it. In these moments beyond the bell, students discover their voices, lead with purpose, build lasting connections, and realize their power to shape a better future.”**

*~ Mary Ellen Daneels, National Board Certified Teacher & Director of the Illinois Civics Hub and Illinois Democracy School Network*

One of the reasons to highlight the IDS model is that it has used a dynamic research-practice partnership with CIRCLE to continuously enhance its model and use the school-wide and cross-disciplinary civic learning approach to strengthen democracy in school and afterschool spaces in the community. IDS is developing ways to intentionally link its school-wide democratic learning model to afterschool spaces and community-based programs, fostering student voice and agency. Their recently revised model, aligned with the **Pedagogy Companion** to the **Educating for American Democracy Roadmap**, helps network schools connect civic knowledge to local issues through community organizations and afterschool initiatives. IDS believes that involving community, family, and caregivers as key stakeholders can also be achieved through afterschool programming.

## Youth Voice in Civic and Democratic Decision Making: Youth Councils

Many mayors, governors, and legislatures across the country have created youth councils: formal bodies made up of youth who provide recommendations to high-level decision makers and elected officials.<sup>32</sup> Youth councils are one way to directly support young people's civic engagement by providing platforms for youth to participate in decision-making, advocate for their communities, and develop leadership skills. Participation in youth councils provides hands-on learning opportunities about the workings of state government, including legislative processes, policy development, and civic responsibilities. The structure and role of youth councils vary from city to city and state to state.

Several notable cities are creating impactful pathways for youth to shape city policy. For example, Hillsboro, Oregon, empowers its youth council members to research and draft policies on youth-related issues. Additionally, cities such as Boston, Massachusetts and Meridian, Idaho, involve young people in participatory budgeting processes, allowing them to influence how taxpayer money is spent. Greenbelt, Maryland, also stands out with city leaders actively championing authentic youth civic engagement and recently lowering the municipal voting age to 16.

Youth councils have the power to make real and lasting changes for the communities they serve. The Maine Legislative Youth Advisory Council, for example, has the distinction of being the first state youth council in the country with the authority to introduce legislation. In 2004, the Council succeeded in getting legislation passed that raised the age from 21 to 23 to allow for continued support for foster care youth enrolled in college.

### Youth Council Spotlight: Vermont State Youth Council

**Vermont Afterschool** is a statewide nonprofit working to ensure all children and youth have access to high-quality out-of-school time programs. Since 2020, it has convened State Youth Advisory Groups to elevate youth input on key policy issues. That summer, around 50 young people collaborated virtually to draft and advocate for the creation of a State Youth Council. Their efforts helped lead to the passage of H.293 (*Act 109: An act relating to creating the State Youth Council*), a bill signed into law by Governor Phil Scott in May 2022.

The first *Vermont State Youth Council* was selected in fall 2022 from over 200 applicants, with members representing every county. The Council, made up of 28 youth, advises the Governor and Legislature on issues affecting young people. Its five subcommittees—Climate Change, Education, Equity & Anti-Racism, Youth Mental Health, and Youth Voice—meet monthly to prepare the advice and recommendations for the Governor and the General Assembly. In its second year, the Council submitted its first set of policy recommendations, solidifying its role in state policymaking.<sup>33</sup> Through this work, Vermont Afterschool and the Council have helped elevate the importance of youth voice in civic decision-making.

State afterschool networks, like Vermont Afterschool, play a key role in supporting Youth Councils—advocating for better policies, funding, and program access. Vermont's model highlights how statewide networks can empower youth leadership, inspiring similar efforts in other states.



Photo credit: Vermont Afterschool

## THE GROWING INTERSECTION OF STEM AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Across the United States, afterschool programs are at the forefront of an exciting movement: integrating science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and other interdisciplinary lenses into civics education. We are at an interesting moment in time when programs that include youth in meaningful ways are now proliferating, and opportunities for youth to engage with knowledge, tools, and experiences in STEM fields in the afterschool environment have also grown significantly.<sup>34</sup> There is a natural intersection between these, as young people must have a strong grounding in STEM and the agency and opportunities to engage in issues that matter to them if they are to make change in today's STEM-driven world. The programs we spotlight vividly illustrate the power of this synergy in practice, demonstrating how they are cultivating a new generation of active and empowered citizens in communities nationwide.

### Spotlight on trubel&co

**trubel&co** is a national program that empowers youth by integrating STEM education with civic innovation to tackle societal challenges. Founded by Nick Okafor—whose passion for science and technology is matched by his commitment to social impact—the organization helps cultivate the next generation of responsible, purpose-driven innovators. trubel&co encourages young people to stir “good trouble” by using tech to address complex societal issues. Recognizing that motivation and purpose look different for everyone, the organization works to diversify STEM by connecting technology with meaningful social change.

“Communities of color and women are drawn into fields that have social impact... we're doing STEM a disservice when we divorce them.”

- Nick Okafor, Founder of trubel&co

Through its flagship program, *Mapping Justice*, launched via MIT's high school STEM outreach in 2020, trubel&co empowers youth to use geospatial technology for social change. The program teaches high

school students to apply GIS and data visualization to explore and address local inequities, while building data literacy, critical thinking, and advocacy skills. Offered free of charge, *Mapping Justice* is a mostly virtual, project-based summer program for students in Hawaii and Gulf Coast states. Participants engage in a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities focused on climate and social justice. trubel&co also offers 90-minute virtual workshops nationwide on what founder Okafor calls “the missing curriculum in STEM,” covering topics like race, power, technology, and geospatial justice.

trubel&co aims to ensure every young person can help build a just, inclusive future. Its programs foster civic mindsets by exposing youth to new information, encouraging discourse, and empowering them to take action on local issues. Student projects have included mapping the impacts of hurricanes in Florida and agricultural fumigants in Hawaii. Rooted in the belief that youth are naturally driven to do good, trubel&co uses STEM to equip them with the tools to create real change in their communities.



Photo credit: trubel&co



## Spotlight on Technovation

**Technovation** is a global technology education nonprofit that empowers girls to become leaders, creators, and problem-solvers by developing tech solutions for problems in their communities. Founded in 2006 as **Iridescent** by Tara Chklovski, an aerospace engineer, Technovation was born from the founder's recognition of the lack of women and people of color in tech. Since then, it has inspired thousands of girls to explore science, technology, and innovation, preparing them to become entrepreneurs and changemakers.



The *Technovation Girls* program engages girls ages 8-18 in coding mobile and web apps that tackle real-world problems. Supported by volunteer mentors and parents, participants work in teams and follow a three-part model: 1) Identify a real community problem to solve; 2) Collaborate with teammates and mentors to design and build an app as part of a global competition event; and 3) Engage local communities through outreach and trust-building. This approach helps girls apply technology in meaningful ways while learning civic responsibility and teamwork.

Technovation's flexible model adapts to different communities and support systems. Through a "train the trainer" approach, they partner with groups like Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, Girls Who Code, and both formal and informal educators. The free, open-access curriculum allows mentors—regardless of prior experience—to learn alongside participants and bring Technovation to a variety of educational settings. To learn more about collaborating with Technovation, visit the partner implementation page on their website.

What sets Technovation apart is its focus on both technical and civic skills, which instills a mindset that young people can make real, noticeable impacts in their communities. Girls gain confidence as they create tech-driven solutions with real impact—from apps that reduce school paper waste to tools that support people with hearing impairments. One team in Argentina built a wildfire-tracking app so effective that the local fire department adopted it over their existing system.



Photo credit: Technovation

## RECOMMENDATIONS & CALLS TO ACTION

Cultivating civically engaged young people is crucial for their well-being, their communities, and the future of democracy. By fostering collaborations that include afterschool programs, which demonstrably build civic dispositions and empower youth to act, we can more effectively bring democratic lessons to life and nurture a new generation of active citizens. When afterschool programs empower youth with agency to tackle challenges, they can create innovative new solutions and be invested in improving the world around them – often beyond what adults can imagine. It is equally important for young people themselves to recognize and seize these opportunities, actively engaging in initiatives that shape their future and their communities.

Recognizing this profound potential, the following recommendations outline a path forward for maximizing youth civic engagement in afterschool programs.

- 1 Empower Authentic Youth Voice and Leadership:** When young people feel their voices are heard and valued, they will build confidence and a sense of agency, recognizing the power of civic engagement and their collective power to address community and public issues.



### **Programs/ Program Designers:**

- Work with youth to identify issues they care about and help them develop action plans.
- Support youth in leading initiatives by forging partnerships with local organizations, community leaders, corporate partners, and government representatives to provide youth with valuable learning opportunities, expose them to diverse perspectives, and demonstrate the tangible impact of civic participation.
- Provide robust platforms for youth to express their opinions and take ownership of their civic actions and connect with youth in other programs as peers and mentors to foster learning and collaboration.
- As the concept of “youth voice” becomes more widespread, share best practices and professional development for authentic youth engagement.



**Policymakers:** Involve young people in local and state policymaking to bring youth voice and perspective into community issues and the long-term effects of policy decisions. Provide guidance and experience from policymakers and institutions on how civic and democratic processes work on the ground and how young people can build upon them and carry them forward.



**Partners and Funders:** Allocate dedicated funding to involve young people in both one-off projects and in more long-term, sustainable decision-making. Funders can lead by example by ensuring adequate support is made available to cover the additional cost of involving young people effectively.

- 2 Focus Intentionally on Developing Youth Civic Identity and Engagement:** Taking a cohesive approach that weaves civic identity throughout established youth development practices—including youth voice and empowerment and holistic youth well-being—will ensure that democratic lessons become an inherent part of young people's personal and social development.



**Programs/Program Designers:** Review and revise program curricula, staff training, and organizational missions to intentionally highlight and cultivate civic identity as a central outcome. Support training that is tailored for the different stakeholders, such as program providers, researchers, young people, and funders.



**Policymakers:** Encourage young people to step into civic life by applying their knowledge in STEM and related fields to solve problems in their community and the nation. Offer decision-making and mobilizing experiences to young people that not only help them apply their knowledge but also build civic identity and skills.



**Funders:** Fund pilot programs that test approaches to empower young change-makers and amplify their voices. These pilots should explore how such initiatives develop civic identity and engagement, and how they can be sustainably scaled across communities nationwide.

- 3 Break Down Silos and Promote Cross-Sector Collaborations:** Actively dismantle existing silos in education by promoting and incentivizing interdisciplinary collaborations across subjects and settings, particularly between schools and afterschool programs. Youth civic engagement—now more than ever—needs a robust and multi-pronged approach that addresses young people's holistic development and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need across career, community, and civic life.



**Programs/Program Designers:**

- As STEM remains an area of growth and investment, purposefully integrate civics with STEM so civic engagement is embedded more deeply into young people's STEM learning.
- Develop joint strategic planning initiatives where representatives from K-12 education, afterschool programming, and community organizations work together to design and implement comprehensive civic engagement opportunities that span school and afterschool settings and leverage the unique strengths of each sector.



**Funders:** Align funding streams to support these comprehensive efforts, such as funding collaboration between K-12 teachers and afterschool programs to be more streamlined, and scaffolding skills young people need in the classroom and in applied, real-world settings.



- 4 Support Integrated Research on Youth Civic Engagement:** Synthesize existing research across STEM, civics, and youth development to effectively support youth in fully realizing their power and agency across all dimensions of their lives, rather than treating each topic as an isolated area.



**Researchers:**

- Center youth voice and expertise in research. Involve youth voice and participation in research design and dissemination, and widely disseminate best practices on how to involve young people effectively, including how their input is received, valued, and acted upon.
- Help youth-led and youth-facing programs understand what evidence-based practices develop youth civic engagement and identity and how they can be translated to local contexts (e.g., how youth civic engagement is different in urban and rural contexts).
- Work with afterschool programs to document the broader systemic impact(s) of youth involvement in their communities through their programs. This may involve developing a documentation framework that afterschool programs can use to capture these broader impacts systemically.
- Promote and conduct cross-disciplinary research on youth civic engagement that integrates civic learning across different subject areas such as STEM, history, and civics, and across settings such as K-12 classrooms, afterschool programs, and community-based settings.



**Funders:** Fund more cross-disciplinary research as well as youth-led and youth-defined research (such as youth participatory action research) to ensure that insights into youth engagement are authentic, relevant, and directly actionable.

- 5 Establish or Expand a Coordinating Entity for Resources, Partnerships, and Exchange of Expertise:** Build new or expand existing networks focused on involving young people authentically in civics and STEM learning. Such networks can mainstream best practices, share lessons learned, broker relationships between stakeholders looking to collaborate, and coordinate tailored professional development and technical assistance for diverse stakeholders.



**Programs/Program Designers:** Connect with your state afterschool network to leverage existing resources and avoid duplicating efforts.



**Funders:** Provide general funding for coalitions and networks, recognizing that backbone or intermediary organizations are essential for coordinating activities and connecting people and programs.

## ENDNOTES

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