



How Afterschool Programs Can Promote Civic Engagement and the Youth Vote in 2024



A Briefing Paper

By Sam Piha and Samantha Fasen

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sam Piha (he/him) has served as founder and president of Temescal Associates since 2007. Sam began his career in 1974 as an afterschool worker, an experience that led to 13 years of classroom teaching and work as a child and family counselor and school social worker. Between 1989 and 2006, Sam managed school-based youth programs at the regional and national levels. He later founded Temescal Associates and The How Kids Learn Foundation, both dedicated to improving the quality of afterschool programs. Sam served as editor and contributing author of several important practice guides and journal articles on afterschool programming. Sam holds a master's degree in Social Welfare.



Samantha Fasen (she/her) joined Temescal Associates and the How Kids Learn Foundation in 2019 and has fully embraced her work with the afterschool field. She helps to coordinate and develop marketing campaigns and multimedia elements to reach a wider audience and share with people the importance of out-of-school time and youth development.



Ren Daraio (they/she) brings over 35 years of experience working in the field of youth development as a facilitator, trainer, and coach. She has experience training and coaching diverse audience groups, from afterschool practitioners and parents to funders and technical assistance providers. Prior to her work with Temescal Associates, Ren was the Deputy Director at the Community Network for Youth Development and a consultant for the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

[Temescal Associates](#) is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development.

[The How Kids Learn Foundation](#) (HKLF) is a 501(c)(3) organization. It is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of settings that support the education and healthy development of youth. This includes schools and out-of-school time programs. The HKL Foundation provides educational and training activities. Examples of activities include conferences, speaker forums, screenings of relevant films, training sessions, coaching sessions, the awarding of digital badges to acknowledge exemplar programs and the learning that happens within these settings. Activities also include the development and distribution of educational materials (papers, self-assessment tools, videos, program guides, etc.). You can see a [catalogue of the resources](#) we've produced for the afterschool field.

FRONT COVER PHOTO: Top left: Ed Week (Jan. 30, 2024), bottom left: The California Endowment, right: Ed Week (Jan. 31, 2024)

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Source: YelloPain

How Afterschool Programs Can Promote Civic Engagement and the Youth Vote in 2024



Source: Center for Tech and Civic Life

INTRODUCTION

*“Voting is a fundamental act of civic participation through which young people contribute to democracy. While it’s just one of many ways to engage in civic life, it is a powerful way for young people to make their voices heard and to have an impact on issues that affect them.”*¹

The 2024 election offers a number of opportunities to engage older youth. But these opportunities require input from youth, organizing and planning- so start program planning early.

There is no better time for youth to be involved in making a change through the ballot box. We can frame these efforts as “meaningful participation”, “civic engagement”, “youth leadership” or “community service”. There are a number of organizations and initiatives that have designed curriculums, program tools and other materials to assist afterschool providers in their efforts to engage youth in the 2024 elections. Many of these can be found in our *Resources to Learn More* section at the end of this paper.

*“The afterschool field is an essential partner in ensuring that all children have the ability to participate in immersive, relevant, and hands-on civic engagement opportunities.” Not only are civic engagement strategies participatory strategies, they contribute to the positive development of youth and the health of our democracy.”*²

According to the [Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#), “historically, young people have voted at lower rates than older adults. That’s starting to change: recent elections have seen historically high youth voter turnout. But major inequities in voting rates by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, region, and age group remain—often the product of highly unequal access to information and opportunities to participate.”³

“4 million Americans turn 18 every year, but we estimate fewer than 30% are registered to vote.”⁴

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEFING PAPER

Some of the contents of this paper are drawn from existing writings on youth engagement in elections. This paper is designed to raise understanding and awareness of the impact of promoting civic engagement in elections in afterschool programs. This paper also provides resources for afterschool and organizational leaders. We recommend that program leaders share this paper with organizational leaders (school leaders and staff, supervisors at the parent non-profit org, etc.) and program staff as they consider the best ways to incorporate election civic engagement into their program.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The definitions provided here are to assist in understanding some frequently used terms in this paper.

Activism – Youth activism is used to describe youths which are engaged in community organizing for social change. Young people engaged as activism planners and leaders in the environmental movement, social justice organizations, as well as anti-racism and anti-homophobia campaigns.

Adultism – “Adultism is the assumption that young people are inferior to adults simply because of their young age. Adults often act on this assumption by limiting our access to decision-making, information, resources, human rights, and opportunities to voice our thoughts.”⁵

Agency – “Youth agency is the desire and ability of young people to make decisions and drive change—in their own lives, in their communities, and in their larger spheres of influence. Agency is a right that allows young people to become the architects of their own future.”⁶

Civic Engagement – Civic engagement encompasses a wide range of actions and behaviors that improve communities and help solve problems. “Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”⁷

Community Service – “Community service is work done by a person or group of people that benefits others. It is often done near the area where you live, so your own community reaps the benefits of your work.”⁸

Democracy – “The word *democracy* most often refers to a form of government in which people choose leaders by voting.”⁹

Disinformation – “False information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.”¹⁰

“In addition, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation are running rampant on social media, and rapidly evolving technology remains vulnerable, experts say.”¹¹

Youth – Different researchers and data sources use varied age ranges to describe “youth” or “young people.” This varies between ages 18-24 and 18-29. Since this paper is for youth programs, most programs we talk about in this paper serve ages up to 18/19 or 18 to 22.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ELECTIONS

Research and experience tell us that involving young people in civic engagement and activism activities brings benefits to youth participants. Benefits are also accrued by the organizational partners and the larger community, as well as adult program staff.

“In economically distressed communities who are the targets of structural racism, we have seen how youth benefit from the opportunity to reflect critically on the world — to ask questions and denaturalize what feels like “normal” by visiting neighboring communities and imagine radical futures and the opportunity to generate solutions through policies or public narratives. These experiences contribute to a sense of agency and belonging that prepares young people to navigate the world with confidence and critical analysis; in some cases it can also offer a context for “healing” that involves personal and social transformation.”¹²

“Benefits of Civic Engagement and Activism for Youth Participants

- Helps them make new friends and contacts and increases their social and relationship skills
- Helps them build social capital
- Increases self-confidence and promotes a positive sense of agency and empowerment
- Combats depression and helps them stay physically healthy
- Supports healing from trauma
- Opportunities to serve others and give back to the community
- Prepares them for leadership roles
- Opens their minds to new ideas and people
- Fuels passion and purpose
- Teaches collaboration
- Brings fun and fulfillment to their lives
- The happiness effect: Helping others kindles happiness, as many studies have demonstrated
- Learn valuable job skills and can offer career experience
- Increases connection to the community
- More likely to remain civically engaged as adults.”¹³

How is youth engagement in elections and voting good for the community?

According to Chat GPT, “Youth engagement in elections and voting is beneficial for the community in several ways:

1. **Representation:** When young people participate in elections, their voices and perspectives are represented in the political process.
2. **Policy Influence:** Increased youth engagement can lead to the prioritization of issues that are important to young people, such as education, employment opportunities, climate change, and

social justice. Elected officials are more likely to address these issues and implement policies that benefit young people when they see them actively participating in the electoral process.

3. **Civic Education and Participation:** Engaging in the electoral process encourages young people to become more informed about political issues and candidates. It also fosters a sense of civic responsibility and encourages them to take an active role in shaping the future of their communities and society as a whole.
4. **Long-Term Impact:** Encouraging youth engagement in elections establishes a habit of voting that can last a lifetime. Research has shown that individuals who vote in their first few elections are more likely to continue voting in subsequent elections throughout their lives.
5. **Social Cohesion:** When different age groups within a community actively participate in elections and voting, it can promote social cohesion and a sense of unity.
6. **Accountability of Leaders:** When young people participate in elections, they hold elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions.

Overall, youth engagement in elections and voting is essential for a healthy democracy and contributes to the overall well-being of the community by ensuring diverse representation, influencing policy decisions, fostering civic education and participation, and promoting accountability and social cohesion.”¹⁴

MYTHS ABOUT YOUTH AND VOTING

Dispelling Myths about Youth Voting

“When many members of the public talk about young people's civic and political participation, they often rely on and perpetuate myths about youth voting and youth attitudes toward civic life. These myths can reflect a lack of understanding of the complex dynamics that shape young people's engagement in democracy. At best, they paint an incomplete picture of these dynamics; at worst, they misrepresent them entirely. These inaccuracies can hinder efforts to increase youth voting and other forms of civic participation.

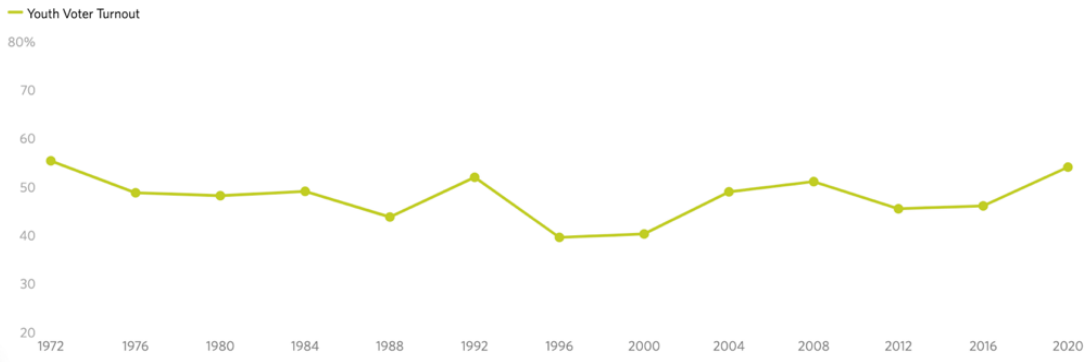
“Young people today are constantly depicted as disengaged and irresponsible. In fact, we are anything but. We are more progressive than our parents, more educated, and far more connected. We are powerful, engaged, and ready to lead.”¹⁵

CIRCLE's two decades of research on these topics, and our work on the ground with a diverse set of partners and practitioners, have given us the data and understanding to dispel some of these myths:

- Young People Are Apathetic
- Youth Voting Has Been Declining for Decades

Youth Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections

CIRCLE estimates of the percentage of eligible young voters, ages 18-29, who cast ballots in each presidential election.



Source: CIRCLE

(The estimates above are from CIRCLE analysis of voter file data in recent elections. Estimates based on the Census data produce slightly different results but allow us to examine historical trends over the past 50 years.)

- Young People Just Choose Not to Vote
- Young People Are All Liberal College Students
- Young Voters Don't Impact Elections.”¹⁶

Dispelling these myths is crucial for understanding and addressing the barriers that may prevent young people from fully participating in the democratic process. Encouraging youth engagement and empowering young voters are essential for ensuring a vibrant and inclusive democracy.”

YOUNG NONVOTERS: WHO THEY ARE AND HOW TO ENGAGE THEM?

“It's no secret that students are not excited or hopeful about the upcoming presidential election and the candidates and seem to be more interested in local elections.” -

John Fuentes, Associate Director, Bay Area Community Resources

According to CIRCLE, “The challenges to equitably engaging youth, like lack of information and support, are highly concentrated among a group of young people who did not vote in 2020 and say they’re unlikely to vote in 2024.

They are much less likely to have heard about how to register and about elections, and therefore feel less qualified to vote. In 2020 and 2024 nonvoters are more likely to be struggling financially and much more likely to prioritize economic issues, which suggests a potential avenue for reaching and engaging them on matters that are affecting their lives.

Half of young people (ages 21-34) who didn’t vote in 2020 say they’re unlikely to vote in 2024 have no college experience. Reaching these youth who may be more disconnected to institutional pathways to engagement will likely require additional investment. But that will make the biggest difference in expanding the electorate, closing equity gaps, and strengthening democracy in 2024.

It is critical to identify and understand these young people who have not participated in the most recent presidential election and, as of now, consider themselves unlikely to vote in 2024. With nearly one year to go before the next election, there is still time and opportunity to reach and engage these youth.

While differences in voter turnout by race/ethnicity remain one of the most persistent and troubling inequities in civic participation, there are no major differences by race between these 2020 and 2024 nonvoters and youth overall.

There are major differences, however, in whether young people have access to information about politics and are feeling qualified for political participation. More than 2 in 5 (42%) of this group of nonvoters wholly disagreed with the statement that they feel qualified-enough to vote—compared to just 11% of other youth who consider themselves unqualified. That may in part be a reflection of personal struggles and of systemic failures to support them: these youth are more likely to say they're not doing well financially or mentally, and more likely to say they feel unsupported by those around them. Moreover, youth who did not vote in 2020 and say they're unlikely to vote in 2024 are much less likely to say they've seen at least some information about state and local elections (34% vs. 68% of other youth) or about when and where to register to vote (34% vs. 66%). They're also less likely to hear about political issues from the media, from campaigns, and from community organizations.

Perhaps because they lack consistent information, the vast majority (71%) of 2020 and 2024 nonvoters say they're undecided about who to support if they were to cast a ballot in the next presidential election. This group of youth is also nearly twice as likely as youth overall to say they don't consider themselves either Republicans or Democrats: 66% vs. 29%. That suggests there is a massive opportunity for all parties and candidates to reach these young people and earn their support.”¹⁷

“WHAT CAN WE DO?”- USEFUL KNOWLEDGE AND TIPS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

Don't Wait- Start Program Planning NOW!

When we spoke to afterschool practitioners in the winter of 2024 about when afterschool programs should begin planning engagement activities, they all responded **“now!”**

Involve Youth

“There are many ways youth can be involved and one of the ways that we support is to provide a space for youth to discuss the topics, issues and challenges they feel are important to them and their communities, then, discuss the possible solutions and who can support the possible solutions and resolutions. This includes local, state and national elected officials. It's important that students continue to explore local officials and the causes that are on top for them.” - John Fuentes, Associate Director, Bay Area Community Resources

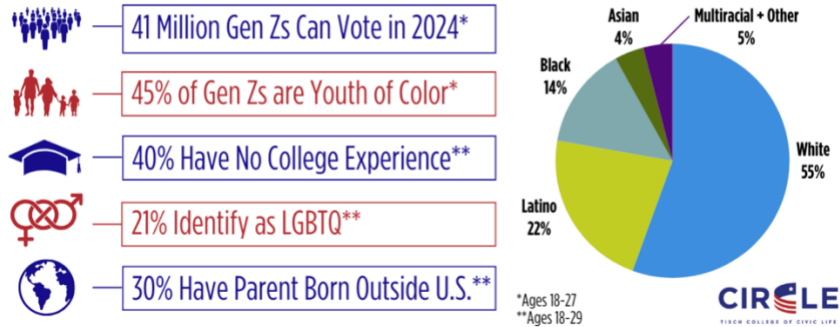
It is important to involve youth when considering any new program initiatives, enlisting new partners or funders. Perhaps youth participants can:

- Provide input on the goals, strategies and activities
- Identify partners in the community that might be appropriate for engaging youth in the 2024 election
- Design and deliver thank you cards for any individuals and organizations that partner in any way
- Organize and lead related discussions and activities
- Get involved with issues that matter to them
- Ask teachers and school to grow voters
- Bring local politicians to their school or youth program

“Young People” Are Not a Monolith

We know that researchers and others define “young people” in many different ways in terms of age. Also, despite common beliefs, young people are not all liberal leaning. In fact, they are very diverse.

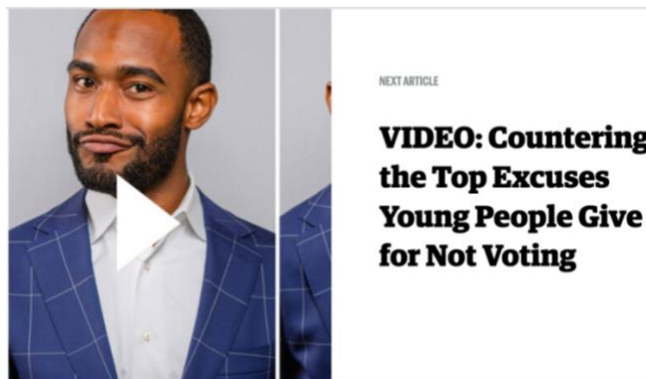
YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DIVERSE



Address the Common Excuses Young People Cite for Not Voting

“Excuses, excuses! Young people find plenty of them not to vote. According to the Pew Research Center, of the roughly 138 million people who voted in the 2016 presidential election, [only 13 percent were under the age of 30](#), while people [over 65 accounted for 27 percent](#) of the vote. What gives?”¹⁸

The video below examines common reasons that young people cite for not voting. Click on the image below to view this resource.



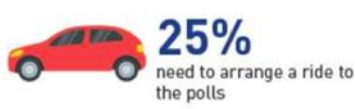
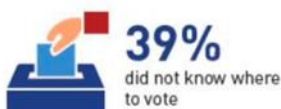
Source: Boston University

Address the Barriers to Voting for Youth Ages 18-29

There are many legitimate barriers to voting, as cited by youth. If we want to encourage youth to vote for the first time, it is essential that we understand the barriers to youth voting. See the graphic below.

BARRIERS TO VOTING

Irrespective of voter registration status, young voters reported the following barriers to vote:



Source: [CIRCLE](#)

Provide Voting Information

A major barrier to voting is simply lack of information. According to CIRCLE, “Many young people are simply not taught about elections and voting in school; both the practicalities of registering and casting a ballot and the reasons why their voices and votes matter in democracy. [Learn more.](#)”

Voting in America is not a straightforward process. Registration deadlines and requirements are different in every state, voting may conflict with work and/or school, absentee voting rules can be confusing, voters may lack transportation to the polls, etc. Some of these barriers are especially acute for the youngest voters, who may struggle to update their voter registration when they move dorms each year in college, or who are less likely to have a driver's license to use as a voter ID. [Learn more.](#)

Because they're less likely to have a voting history or be seen as likely voters, many political organizations neglect youth outreach. In 2022, almost half of young people we surveyed (46%) said they were not contacted by any type of organization, candidate, or party. That can lead to a lack of information and confidence: 21% of youth in 2022 said it was because they didn't feel like they knew enough, and just 40% said they felt well-qualified to participate in politics. [Learn more](#)¹⁹

My vote won't make any difference to the outcome of the election.

Source: Boston University

Also,

- Research issues and candidates: sponsor forums and make voter guides/informational handouts
- Provide State-by-state information - Every state has different voting requirements. Click [here](#) to access a good State-by-state tool.
- Review the ballot with youth so they understand what's on it and how to use it.
- Where to go to vote?

About Absentee Voting or Voting by Mail

“Absentee voting allows you to vote before Election Day by mail or drop box. Learn how to get an absentee ballot, cast your vote, and meet voting deadlines. Although every state has absentee voting, deadlines and rules on who can take part vary. In most states, you will need to request an absentee ballot to vote in each election. But in some states, you may qualify to receive absentee ballots permanently. [Learn if you can vote absentee for every election in your state.](#)

Get your absentee ballot from your state or territory. Visit [Can I Vote](#) and choose your state from the dropdown menu. It will take you right to your state's absentee voting page.

Your state may require you to have a valid excuse to vote absentee. Acceptable excuses vary by state. Most include:

- Being unable to get to your polling place due to illness, injury, or disability
 - Being on business travel or vacation outside of your county or city of residence on Election Day
 - Being a student at an out-of-state college or university
- Know your state's absentee ballot deadlines*
- Make sure you follow your state's deadlines for requesting and returning your absentee ballot. [See your state's absentee voting deadlines.](#) And note whether the deadline is for when your ballot must be postmarked or for when it must be received by the elections office.
- You received an absentee ballot but want to vote in person*
- You might be able to vote in person on Election Day, even if you received a mail-in ballot. Every state has different rules, so check with your [state or local election office](#) for the specific procedures. Typically, you would take your absentee ballot to your designated polling place on Election Day. Depending on your state's rules, you might exchange your uncast absentee ballot for an in-person ballot, or complete your absentee ballot and hand it in, or cast a provisional ballot.”²⁰

Misinformation and News literacy

According to the [News Literacy Project](#), “The 2024 election season will be among the most closely followed in American history, and as in past years, it also will attract a flood of mis- and disinformation. A new development this year is the rise of artificial intelligence technologies, which can create sophisticated fabrications and distortions that challenge our ability to identify what's real and what's not like never before.

The News Literacy Project is working to ensure that you know how to discern fact from fiction and can make well-informed voting decisions when you go to the polls.”²¹

[The News Literacy Project](#) has several tools and activities for youth to discern fact from disinformation.

Preparing First Time Voters: Help Youth Create a Voting Plan

“Vote planning is a technique to ensure voters turnout to the polls. The goal of a vote plan is to encourage an individual to envision themselves voting and identify any potential barriers they might have or encounter. You can make a vote plan for yourself or with someone when phone banking, canvassing, or in normal conversation. Develop a vote plan by asking questions such as:

- What time will you be voting?
- Where are you voting?
- Do you have a mail-in ballot or are you going to the polls?
- How are you getting there?
- Do you need a ride?
- Who else can you bring with you?
- Do you need to take off school or work or secure childcare?
- In states with voter I.D. laws: Do you have all the necessary documents to vote?



Answering these questions will help youth plan how to vote and ensure you and your community members are able to cast your ballots.”²²

Voter Registration

Did you know that in many states young people can pre-register to vote at the age of 16-17? Student organizers and adult volunteers work collaboratively with schools, organizations and events to coordinate voter registration drives that target high school and college students. To learn more about organizing voter registration drive, click [here](#). You can also share a video by young people on voter registration drives by clicking on the image below.



Source: [Our Time is Now: CA Pre-Registration PSA](#)

Voter Registration: Bringing Voter Registration to Your High School

“High schools are the most efficient and equitable system we have for getting young people registered, particularly the 40% who do not attend college.”²³



Source: Ed Week

Paper and online registration drives can occur during classes, lunch periods, school assemblies, school orientation days, school club days, marches, etc. After students register, they are challenged to recruit other youth to register and/or to organize new registration drives and are encouraged to vote in every election. To learn more and access a guide for organizing a registration drive, click [here](#)."

"We registered 103 students in 2.5 hours at one high school with the help of a student League member who attends the school and a social studies teacher and his students." ²⁴ - member of the League of Women Voters of Henderson County (NC)



"The Civics Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that empowers high school students to hold peer-to-peer voter registration events in their high schools. When students invite their peers into the democratic process, they build civic engagement, develop leadership skills and strengthen our democracy. We are committed to nonpartisanship and an inclusive spirit of voter registration. We also prioritize collaboration with school faculty and administration as well as local election officials.

Here are the process students will use to organize a voter registration event in your school:

1. Attend a [45-minute online workshop](#) held by The Civics Center which outlines the importance of youth voter registration, the process of planning an event in your school, and how to register to vote and help others to register in your state. Find a workshop for your state on our website.
2. Gather volunteers from a club, honors society, class, or group of friends.

"I organized a registration drive at my school all by myself. It wasn't the best time of the year due to AP testing, but I was able to register 99 of my classmates. I also volunteered at other schools' registration drives. I think we need to get a lot of young adults voting because then if politicians want to be re-elected, they will have to advocate for our views." ²⁵ – Michael, high school student

3. Coordinate with the school administration to pick one or more dates, times, and locations to hold a voter registration event. Voter registration is usually conducted either with tables and clipboards during a lunch period, or through student-led presentations in a homeroom, advisory, or class period.
4. Register your school on The Civics Center’s website listing an estimated date for the planned event and the name and email of a faculty sponsor.
5. Receive a toolkit, [Democracy in a Box](#), free from The Civics Center before the event. *Democracy in a Box* is a starter kit that includes pens, clipboards, stickers, posters, candy, and more supplies to help make your event as easy as possible and fun for participants. We ship Democracy in a Box to the designated faculty sponsor to promote effective collaboration within the school.
6. Acquire voter registration forms. We go over this process in the webinar training; in many states, this is as simple as printing a PDF. In some states, it’s simpler to use online voter registration.
7. Hold the voter registration event on the selected date(s) using the materials in *Democracy in a Box*, and report back the number of registrations to The Civics Center via email.
8. Return the completed voter registration forms to your local elections official within 2-3 days of the event.”²⁶

“We plan to host registration events, and possibly even parties; on election day, we plan to go with teens who are voting for the first time and to make a big deal of it (e.g., “It’s my first-time voting” hats or sashes).” – Rebecca Fabiano, Executive Director, FAB Youth Philly

NOTE: After registration, a *Get Out the Vote* campaign can begin. Students are reminded about upcoming candidate forums and elections. Youth are also encouraged to create social events such as *Flash Mob Voting* (meeting at one location and marching to a post office with mail-in ballots) and election night watch parties.

Obtain Leadership Buy-In

Ensure buy-in from your parent organization and school leaders. This signals that the initiative is an organization-wide priority and is a prerequisite for success.

Partnerships

There are many organizations, both national and local, that are dedicated to involving youth in elections. Many of these offer activity instructions and tools to engage youth. You can find many of these organizations listed below under the section *Resources To Learn More*. These organizations can be useful partners in designing and implementing efforts to engage youth. You may be also able to identify local and national funders who are interested in this topic.

Preparing Staff and Youth

The first step is to learn from other youth programs who have made intentional efforts to engage youth in elections already. You can ask them or potential partners (discussed above) how best to prepare staff and youth. You can consider both training, orientation and field trips.

We learned about how [teachers and youth workers](#) can use a video by rapper, YelloPain, entitled, "My Vote Don't Count" which can be viewed by clicking on the image below.



Source: YelloPain, "My Vote Don't Count"

WHAT ELSE YOUTH CAN DO

Serve as a Voting Captain

"This is someone who volunteers to get-out-the-vote by talking to their friends and family about making a voting plan. This is a quick, easy and covid-safe volunteer opportunity to get out the vote. Studies have shown that talking to friends and family is the most effective way to increase voter turnout." ²⁷

Serve as a Political Campaign Volunteer

Supporting a campaign may involve an important issue or a candidate. Youth can:

- Volunteer on a local, state, or national political campaign
- Attend a campaign event with a family member
- Talk to those who are eligible to vote about your preferred candidates, what they stand for, and why it matters to you.

Serve as a Poll Worker

"Poll workers are critical to the success of an election. Having an adequate number of poll workers to staff polling places on and before Election Day can ensure voters receive the assistance they need at the polls and can help provide a positive and smooth voting experience for all. By signing up to be a poll worker, you can Help America Vote.



Source: Grow the Vote

While specific duties and compensation vary depending on location, poll workers are the face of the election office during voting. Most jurisdictions task election workers with setting up and preparing the polling location, welcoming voters, verifying voter registrations, and issuing ballots. Poll workers also help ensure voters understand the voting process by demonstrating how to use voting equipment and explaining voting procedures." ²⁸

Click [here](#) to learn a few important steps poll workers can take to ensure they are ready for Election Day. Click [here](#) to learn more about becoming a poll worker in the future, for more information on being a poll worker in your community and how to sign up.

WAYS YOUTH UNDER 18 CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ELECTIONS

“Our youth feel that their voice matters even if they cannot vote”. - John Fuentes, Associate Director, Bay Area Community Resources (BACR)



“There are countless ways for young people under 18 to participate in democracy. These contributions can occur in a range of settings and have a wide-reaching influence. These ways of engaging are steps on a path to growing as a future voter and to help [grow voters](#) in your community.

Support Your Family & Friends' Participation

- Ask your friends and family if they are eligible and registered to vote, and if necessary bring them information to help them register. If they're not eligible, ask them how they are going to participate
- Help friends and family find reliable information about the election, the candidates, and important issues that they care about
- Watch and discuss a local or national debate/forum with your family and friends
- Organize or support conversations at school about elections and voting
- Bring the [Teaching for Democracy Alliance checklist](#) or [commitment](#) to school leaders and work with them to make a plan to support student learning

Uplift Stories & Issues You Care About

- Do research on an issue/policy you're interested in to find reliable information on the candidates' stance on the issue, and then share your viewpoint with those who can vote
- Factcheck your research and then create media (e.g. images, videos, music) about candidates or issues you're interested in and share them with others
- Evaluate a range of news media coverage of the issues and candidates to understand how journalists are covering the election
- Contact local media outlets about the issues you care about and offer to share your opinions and insights
- Create media about the people and issues in a community that has few local media outlets or that you think hasn't been portrayed accurately in election coverage
- Tell stories about how youth of all ages—especially those from communities of color—are engaging in the election and share it with news organizations and social media so that a wider diversity of young people are better represented

Be a Part of the Process

- Find out if you can work at the polls on Election Day—many states allow 16- and 17-year-olds to do it!
- Work with a local organization that is registering others to vote
- Design posters with key information about how, when and where to vote, and put them up at school and in your community
- Send your friends and family reminders of when and where to vote on Election Day—even drive them if they need a ride!”²⁹

Start A Discussion Group at School

“Political polarization is a dire problem in American high schools today. *Crossing the Divide* is a national high school club facilitating the conversations we desperately need.” They provide instructions and curriculum tools. ³⁰

Younger Kids

Fun activities can introduce younger kids to the idea of voting and to show them that voting is fun and important! To view, click [here](#). ³¹

VOICES OF FIELD LEADERS

We interviewed several afterschool leaders on the importance of youth involvement in the elections and the benefits of youth civic engagement.



Rebecca Fabiano (RF),
Fab Youth Philly



John Fuentes (JF),
Bay Area Community
Resources



Silvestre Vallejo (SV),
Formerly with CalSAC

Q: Do you think it is important to encourage youth to be involved in the 2024 election? (This could involve making a plan to vote, registering students who will be eligible to vote, volunteering for a campaign or candidate that they agree with, etc.) If yes, why?

RF- YES! We think it is very important to encourage youth to be involved in 2024 election at both the local and national level. One of our greatest rights, and responsibility as an American, is the right to Vote – which was not afforded to everyone throughout our history. I happen think everyone should be given a voter registration card when they are issued their birth certificate, it's that important.

JF- Yes, I think it's very important and so do the youth we work with. Our youth feel that their voice matters even if they can not "vote". At a few of our high schools in Oakland, we have lots of civic leadership/action groups including a group of students in our program who go to Sacramento every year to meet with Legislators and share their stories about the importance of expanded learning programs. We'll be there again with over 60 young people on March 12th.

SV- I do think it's absolutely imperative to encourage and support youth to be involved in the 2024 election. Although youth can be quite vocal (and influential) on social media about issues important to them, statistically speaking however, they are one of the least engaged groups when it comes to voter turnout.

Q: Could you describe what you are planning to do with engaging youth in the 2024 election?

RF - We plan to host registration events, and possibly even parties; on election day, we plan to go with teens who are voting for the first time and to make a big deal of it (e.g., “It’s my first time voting” hats or sashes).

Q: When should programs begin planning for this?

RF- NOW! States will have different deadlines for voter registration so be sure you know what they are.

SV- I think it's never too early for programs to plan for this.

Q: How should youth be involved?

RF- They can be involved in planning, they can be trained to help register others to vote, they can create messages about the importance of voting, they can schedule meetings with various candidates or attend Town Hall events and submit questions for prospective candidates- they can host their own forums with the candidates.

JF- There are many ways youth can be involved and one of the ways that we support, especially during expanded learning programs, is to provide a space for youth to discuss the topics, issues and challenges they feel are important to them and their communities, then, discuss the possible solutions and who can support the possible solutions and resolutions. This includes local, state and national elected officials. It's important that students continue to explore local officials and the causes that are on top for them.

Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) is part of a statewide youth civic action group called TACA (Teens Advocating for Civic Action) and students meet monthly on zoom to discuss the issues they're facing and the action steps they're taking including the upcoming election and its impact on those issues.

SV- I think youth should be involved in the planning and implementation as much as possible, from informing the creation of lesson plans/contents (via advisory committees, polls, surveys, etc.) to co-facilitation for their peers and helping these programs be student-driven/led as much as possible. At the end of the day, students listen to their peers more than adults. Involving youth is crucial to ensure their voices are heard, and we are not addressing these topics through our adult lens.



Below, we offer some words from other afterschool practitioners on the benefits of youth civic engagement:



“Students build social capital, a valuable skillset they can apply in virtually any career and in civic life, a highly-attractive college, career, and civic portfolio, opportunities to collaborate vs. compete with their peers and opportunities to effect the change they want to see in the world.” - Rachel Belin, Kentucky Student Voice Team

“Youth gain a sense of self in the larger world and political environment. They gain a sense of being a part of the system with the ability to affect vs being passive members of a community where things happen to them.” - Brad Lupien, Arc Experience



“Youth have an understanding of the country’s democratic process and understand how to navigate the barriers to participation. Youth are able to form their own opinions and political ideology.” - Jenifer Hughes, YMCA of San Francisco

“They learn to conduct hands-on research like site visits, interviews, and surveys. They learn to think critically about why disparities persist and are challenged to do innovative problem solving. They become more comfortable with public speaking and with speaking to legislators and other stakeholders. Many students do go on to major in political science, join civic-oriented clubs on campus, pursue careers in politics, etc. But I’ve seen that even students who go on to do things in other fields report that what they learned here has prepared them for the ‘real world’ in more ways than one.” - Laura Jankstrom, Youth Action NYC



We also interviewed Jamileh Ebrahimi from RYSE Youth Center in Richmond, CA. Jamileh has been the Youth Organizing Director since 2012. In this role, she builds a vibrant youth organizing culture both at the Center and in the Richmond community.



Jamileh Ebrahimi

Q: Please describe RYSE's civic engagement activities.

A: RYSE's young people ages 13-21 engage in campaign planning, peer education, community outreach, narrative shifting and storytelling, voter/civic engagement (voter registration, phone banking and door-to-door canvassing) and local/statewide advocacy efforts. Youth organizing efforts target our city council, school district, criminal legal system, and local/statewide health, housing, education, and economic funding/policy decisions. RYSE is part of multiple coalitions with youth representatives in leadership roles locally and statewide that support our local civic education and voter mobilization/registration efforts.

Q: How do you prepare staff to lead civic engagement and youth activism activities?

A: RYSE leverages our partnerships with [Power California Alliance](#) and the [YO! California Network](#), for additional training and capacity building support covering youth organizing, campaigns and integrated civic/voter engagement.

Q: Who is the target audience for these activities?

A: RYSE serves young people, ages 13-21 and engages over 700 young people annually (98% identify as BIYOC, 14% LGBTQ, 75% low income), centering their experience and expertise. Our voter engagement activities target young voters, 18-34 years old.

Q: Why do you offer these activities and why do kids join?

A: We seek to address the need for more young people in policy, electoral, and civic engagement spaces pushing for accountability in the decision-making processes that impact their lives. Youth-led and community-led framing of policy decisions can better ensure that daily, ongoing, and acute needs are met and reconciliatory practices are established to undo the exclusions and harms they and their communities have experienced.

Q: Please describe any challenges you encounter.

A: Last year, our voter and civic engagement activities were impacted due to the global pandemic. Traditional voter outreach efforts, like door-to-door canvassing, volunteer mobilizations, peer-to-peer voter (pre)registration and in-person community events, were limited. We were able to test out new virtual strategies with our Census outreach and education, including virtual phone banking and activities and events were primarily held virtually. We increase our online education efforts utilizing virtual workshops, social media and producing our first-ever voter guide developed by RYSE youth and staff.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Source: Temescal Associates

- What are you doing to promote youth engagement in the 2024 election?
- Would you add any additional resources or comments that would be valuable to afterschool stakeholders?

Email us at info@temescalassociates.com

YOUTH VOICE

What do young people say about voting and elections? Below are a few videos worth viewing and sharing with youth. Click on the photo to view the video.

“I registered to vote because youth and women fought hard so people like me could vote. I want to use that privilege to help me make decisions that will make my country better for all. After mailing in my first ballot, I felt like an adult and I was proud that I fulfilled a giant responsibility that makes a difference.”³² – Anthea, high school student

“Why should young people vote? As we grapple with racial inequities, violence and a pandemic that has killed 215,000 Americans, this year's presidential election may be the most important in modern history. Many students say they're energized to vote, but will they? Fewer than half of those 18 to 29 voted in the 2016 presidential election...We asked two Boston University students involved in voter registration initiatives to talk about the importance of registering, casting your ballot, and staying politically involved beyond sporting an 'I voted' sticker. Here's what they had to say about why young people should vote.”

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This story follows students at Saeger Middle School in the Francis Howell School District (FHSD) and shows how Mr. Van Horn prepares them for a future of choosing the leaders and policies that affect our daily lives.



What would get young people to vote? These teens have some ideas. NewsHour Student Reporting Labs interviewed 300 young people to get the next generation's take on why it is important to vote.



So, why don't young people vote as much as older people? Find out in the latest *Above the Noise* episode

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

In the end notes, we have linked all the articles that we reference in the paper to allow easy access. Below are some additional linked resources.

NOTE: This is not a comprehensive list, as there are many program resources on the topic, some of which are detailed in our paper, [Youth Civic Engagement and Activism in Expanded Learning Programs](#). You can view previous LIAS blogs on this topic [here](#). You can also view a recent recording of our webinar we conducted on this topic [here](#).

ORGANIZATIONS THAT FOCUS ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ELECTIONS

- [Youth Voter Movement](#)
- [When We All Vote-https://civcnation.org/our-initiatives/all-in/](https://civcnation.org/our-initiatives/all-in/)
- [2024 My School Votes Ambassadors Program](#)
- [Rock the Vote](#)
- [The Civics Center](#)
- [Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#) (CIRCLE)
- [Afterschool Alliance](#)
- [News Literacy Project](#)
- [The VOICE Project](#)
- [Vote.org](#)
- [Next Gen America](#)
- [Kids Voting USA](#)
- [Alliance for Youth Action](#)
- [Vote America](#)
- [Turnout Nation](#)
- [Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity](#)
- [Next Generation Politics](#)

TOOLKITS AND OTHER RESOURCES

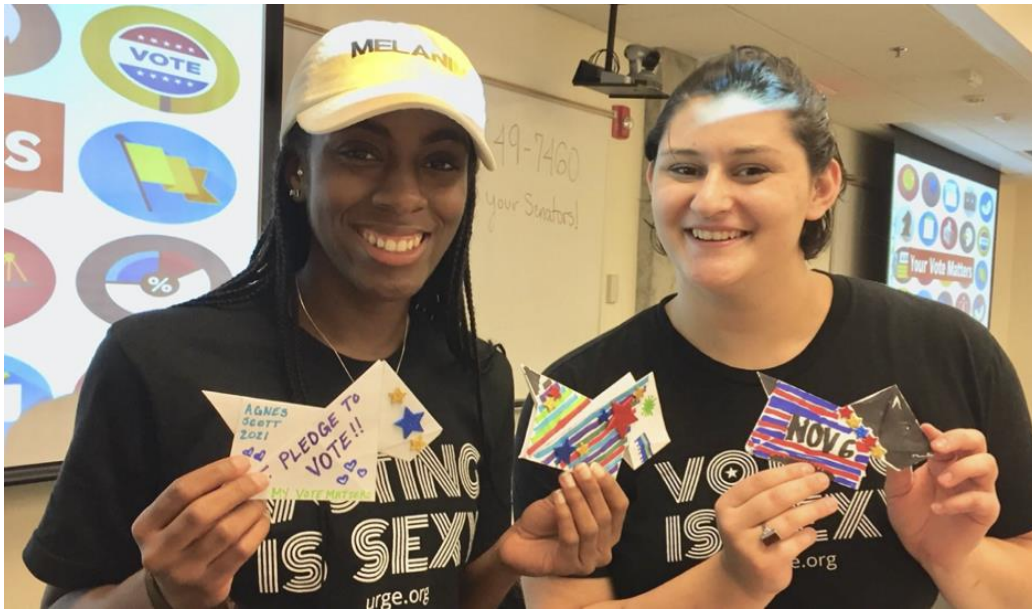
- [Rock the Vote Democracy Class](#)
- [The Civics Center- Bringing Voter Registration to Your School](#)
- [Afterschool Alliance Election Toolkit](#)
- [Crossing the Divide- Conversations for a Brighter Future](#)
- [Center for Tech and Civic Life](#)

ARTICLES/REPORTS

- [Growing Voters: 18 Ways Youth Under 18 Can Contribute to Elections](#)
- [The Civics Center- Bringing Voter Registration to your School](#)
- [Ed Week: Michelle Obama Wants to Train Teachers to Help Students Vote](#)
- [New York Times- Election 2020: 11 Ways to Engage Students from Now Until November](#)

VIDEOS

- [Beyond the Broadcast: Covering the 2024 elections](#)
- [How Can We Get More Young People to Vote?](#)
- [Why Should Young People Vote?](#)
- [Countering the Top Excuses Young People Give for Not Voting](#)
- [My Vote Will Count - YelloPain ft. Sevyn Streeter](#)
- [Our Time is Now: CA Pre-Registration PSA](#)
- [What would get young people to vote? These teens have some ideas.](#)
- [Kids Voting at Manatee Bay Elementary](#)
- [Kids Voting in Francis Howell School District](#)



Source: URGE.org

END NOTES

- ¹ CIRCLE, [Broadening Youth Voting](#)
- ² Afterschool Alliance, [Election Toolkit](#)
- ³ CIRCLE, [Broadening Youth Voting](#)
- ⁴ The Civics Center, [Our Purpose](#)
- ⁵ SEL4CA, [What is Adulthood?](#)
- ⁶ International Youth Foundation, [What is Youth Agency?](#)
- ⁷ ELON University, [Civic Responsibility Definitions](#)
- ⁸ Christine Sarikas, [Definition: What is Community Service?](#)
- ⁹ Merriam-Webster, [Democracy](#)
- ¹⁰ Merriam-Webster, [Disinformation](#)
- ¹¹ Sasha Pezenik & Josh Margolin, [The Top Threats Facing the 2024 Election](#)
- ¹² Sam Piha & Samantha Fasen, [Youth Civic Engagement and Activism in Expanded Learning Programs](#)
- ¹³ IBID.
- ¹⁴ Chat GPT, [How is youth engagement in elections and voting good for the community?](#)
- ¹⁵ IBID.
- ¹⁶ CIRCLE, [Dispelling Myths about Youth Voting](#)
- ¹⁷ CIRCLE, [Youth and the 2024 Election: Likely to Vote and Ready to Drive Action on Key Political Issues](#)
- ¹⁸ Boston University, [Countering the Top Excuses Young People Give for Not Voting](#)
- ¹⁹ CIRCLE, [Broadening Youth Voting](#)
- ²⁰ USA.gov, [Absentee voting or voting by mail](#)
- ²¹ News Literacy Project, [Election 2024: Be informed, not misled](#)
- ²² National Council of Jewish Women, [Create A Voting Plan](#)
- ²³ The Civics Center, [Our Purpose](#)
- ²⁴ League of Women Voters, [The League Empowers Teens Through Youth Voter Registration Programs](#)
- ²⁵ Youth Voter Movement, [About the Movement](#)
- ²⁶ The Civics Center, [Bringing Voter Registration to Your High School](#)
- ²⁷ Turnout Nation, [Become a Voting Captain](#)
- ²⁸ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, [Poll Worker Resources for Voters](#)
- ²⁹ CIRCLE, [Growing Voters: 18 Ways Youth Under 18 Can Contribute to Elections](#)
- ³⁰ [Crossing the Divide](#)
- ³¹ Moms Rising- [Crafts, activities, and ideas to celebrate voting with your kids](#)
- ³² Youth Voter Movement, [About the Movement](#)
- ³³ [Why Young People Should Vote](#)



Source: The League of Women Voters