

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM IN EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS



By Sam Piha and Samantha Fasen, Temescal Associates and
The How Kids Learn Foundation



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ABOUT



Temescal Associates (www.temescalassociates.com) is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. Our clients include leaders of youth serving institutions and organizations, school and youth program practitioners, public and private funders, intermediary organizations, and policy makers. Their work ranges from building large scale youth and community initiatives to providing services to young people on a day-to-day basis.



The How Kids Learn Foundation (HKL) (www.howkidslearn.org) 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 that promote the capacity of organizations that support the education and healthy development of youth. 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.).



Source: www.mesacc.edu

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Source: www.treepeople.org

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM IN EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

PART ONE: OVERVIEW



Source: <https://dcist.com/story/08/04/24/calling-the-you/>

INTRODUCTION

According to the Afterschool Alliance, “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.”¹

“Not only do young people have the capacity to understand the world around them, they have the capacity to lead it.” - Gabe Abdellatif, youth contributor and former trustee, America’s Promise Alliance

The purpose of this paper is to inform and encourage expanded learning programs to offer youth opportunities to be civically engaged. Civic engagement strategies are participatory

strategies and contribute to the positive development of youth and our democracy. There are already many program resources on the topic, some of which are detailed in the end notes. Thus, we are not looking to “reinvent the wheel”. Rather, it is our intention to capture and share valuable and intriguing ideas. Start today infusing civic engagement and activism in your afterschool curriculum and settings.

“Youth civic engagement is critical to our democracy. Young people benefit personally by participating and communities need their voices and their energies to address problems. The future of our democracy depends on each new generation developing the skills, values and habits of participation.”² - CIRCLE, [*Executive Summary*](#)

HISTORY OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM IN AMERICA

Recent events in the news such as multiple mass shootings and police violence led to youth participation in the March for Our Lives and the Black Lives Matter movement, calling for greater awareness and policy changes. Also, the growing degradation of the environment and climate change has inspired youth led action.



Youth civic engagement and activism began in the mid- to late nineteenth century when young people began forming labor strikes in response to their working conditions, wages, and hours. In 1908, Mary Harris “Mother” Jones organized the first youth activism in the U.S., marching 100,000 child miners. Youth activists went on to advocate for a number of issues, including voting rights, school desegregation, immigration reform and LGBTQ+ rights.

“Because young people often have the desire, energy and idealism to do something about the injustice they see in the world, they are powerful agents for change.”³ - Marianne Stenger



1909, (New York City), Photograph shows two girls wearing banners with slogan "ABOLISH CHILD SLAVERY!!" in English and Yiddish.

IMPORTANT TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

There are a number of important terms used in this paper. Below we offer a few definitions to ensure clarity and consistency.

Activism - "Youth activism is used to describe youths which are engaged in community organizing for social change. Young people are engaged as activism planners and leaders in the environmental movement, social justice organizations, as well as anti-racism and anti-homophobia campaigns." ⁴

Adulthood - "Adulthood 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

"We've all heard adults tell kids, you have no reason to be stressed. You don't pay bills. You don't go to work. That's what I like to call toxic adulthood. Although we might not pay bills or go to work, we go to school, and we deal with other issues. Just because we're younger does not mean our issues should be minor compared to adults." ⁶ - Jakeelah Blacknell, grade 8

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 allows young people to become the architects of their own future.”⁷

Here’s what young people need to unlock their agency: ⁸



A BELIEF IN
THEMSELVES



KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO WORK
EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHERS



UNDERSTANDING OF THE
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES
IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM.

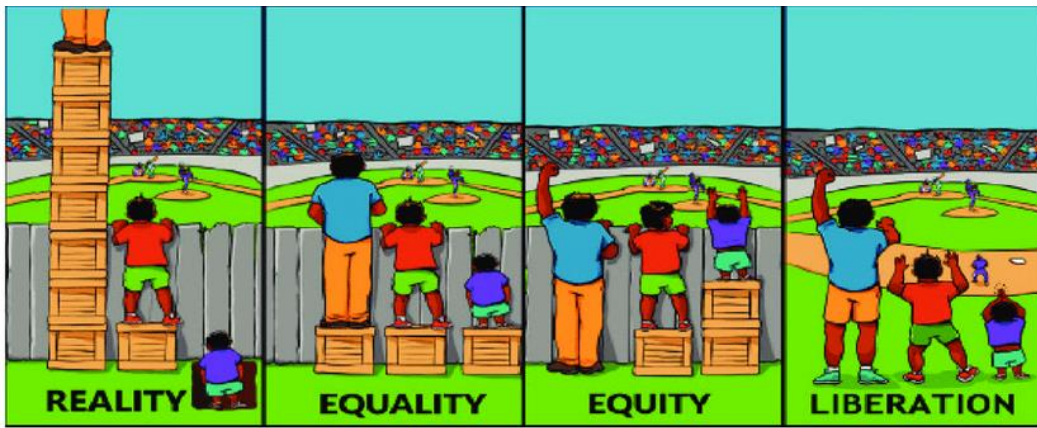
Source: <https://iyfglobal.org/youth-agency>

Authentic Learning - “Authentic learning is an instructional approach that places students at the heart of real-life experiences. Armed with a challenge to address, a task to be handled, or content to explore, students develop academic and problem-solving skills in a context that is relevant to the learner.”⁹

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.”¹⁰

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. You do not get paid to perform community service, though sometimes food and small gifts, like a t-shirt, are given to volunteers. Community service can help any group of people in need: children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, English language learners, and more. It can also help animals, such as those at a shelter, and it can be used to improve places, such as a local park, historic building, or scenic area as well. Community service is often organized through a local group, such as a place of worship, school, or non-profit organization. You can also start your own community service projects.”¹¹

Equity - Equity is often confused with equality. “Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.”¹²



Source: The difference between the terms equality, equity, and liberation, illustrated;
 © Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire

Expanded Learning Programs (ELP) – This term refers to community- based and school-based youth programs that are conducted before or after the school day and during the summer. These programs are also referred to as afterschool, out-of-school time (OST), or summer learning programs.

Healing Centered Engagement- “A key component of Healing Centered Engagement, is taking loving action, by collectively responding to political decisions and practices that can exacerbate trauma. By taking action, (e.g. school walkouts, organizing peace march, or promoting access to healthy foods) it builds a sense of power and control over their lives. Research has demonstrated that building this sense of power and control among traumatized groups is perhaps one of the most significant features in restoring holistic well-being.”¹³

To learn more about Healing Centered Engagement, see the LIAS Blog entitled, [Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement](http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/2018/08/shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-3.html) (<http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/2018/08/shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-3.html>).

Meaningful Contribution - “When we talk about contributing, it’s not just about being kind or volunteering here and there (although both are important). It refers to “contributions of consequence”—actions that have substantial benefits to others that help to reach a shared goal. This type of contributing involves not simply taking a single action but playing an important role within a group—whether it’s a family, school, or community.”¹⁴

Sanctuary - “Youth descriptions of sanctuary often went a step beyond what is commonly referred to as psychological safety, which is defined as feeling comfortable enough to take interpersonal risks; that is, a state in which people feel confident to express their views or make mistakes. A protected space may be considered psychologically safe, and this may be an important component of sanctuary. However, an affirming space does not simply lack physical or psychological danger. Rather, youth were often quick to note that aspects of their identity are celebrated (not just tolerated) in these spaces.”¹⁵

Service Learning - According to Vanderbilt University, service learning is defined as: "A form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves." ¹⁶

Social Capital - "The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. 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"]. The term social capital emphasizes not just warm and cuddly feelings, but a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for the people who are connected and – at least sometimes – for bystanders as well." ¹⁷

Social Justice - Social justice promotes fairness and equity across many aspects of society. "Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities." ¹⁸

BENEFITS OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM

Research and experience tell us that involving young people in civic engagement and activism activities brings benefits to youth participants. Some of these are detailed in the chart below. Benefits are also accrued by the organizational partners and the larger community, as well as adult program staff. (You can also see how youth and program leaders describe the benefits in part three below.)

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
- Provides a sanctuary
- 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 adult

“When their contributions are recognized, young people come to understand their place and value in the world.”¹⁹ - Meghan Lynch Forder

How adolescents benefit from contributing - According to the Greater Good Science Center, “Studies have shown that students who are helpful, cooperative, and sharing tend to be more popular than those who use fear or intimidation to gain status, providing another incentive to contribute. This is particularly crucial to adolescents, who, thanks to hormonal changes beginning at the onset of puberty, are extremely sensitive to belonging and earning respect. The stress-reducing effects of contributing may also be especially important during adolescence, when teens’ bodies and minds are highly reactive to stress (more so than at any other age).²⁰

“Now I’m very confident in myself. I know that I can make changes. Sometimes I used to think that our lives were kind of pointless. And now, it’s like, you can make real changes. Now it’s the school and maybe in my career and my adult life, I could actually do something with a lot of determination and will.”²¹ - Rosalinda, 12th grader

Most importantly, contributing provides adolescents the experiences they need to complete the key tasks of this life stage: building autonomy, identity, and intimacy. Making meaningful contributions to others allows adolescents to see that they can have a positive effect on the world, giving them the confidence necessary to build autonomy and agency. When their contributions are recognized, young people come to understand their place and value in the world, developing their sense of identity. Having the opportunity to provide meaningful social support to friends and family builds the intimacy they’ll need to form positive, long-lasting relationships in adulthood.”²²

“Benefits really depend on the type of program you are talking about and who is participating. I have done research about youth organizing groups that engage young people of color growing up in economically distressed communities who are the targets of structural racism. In these settings, we have seen how youth benefit from the opportunity to a) reflect critically on the world — to ask questions and denaturalize what feels like “normal” by visiting neighboring communities and imagine radical futures and b) 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.” - Dr. Ben Kirshner, University of Colorado, Boulder (From an interview with Temescal Associates)

WHY YOUTH PARTICIPATE

“Urban youth collectively respond to community and school problems through youth organizing, spoken word, volunteering, and participation in civic affairs. Organizations in urban communities can provide youth with opportunities to and develop critical civic praxis through engagement with ideas, social networks, and experiences that build individual collective capacity to struggle for social justice. This view of youth acknowledges structural constraints in their communities, but also views young people as active participants in changing debilitating neighborhood conditions.”²³ – Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota

There have been many studies examining the reasons why youth participate in civic engagement and activism activities. Below we offer some highlights from selected studies focusing on why youth participate.

- From *Reasons Youth Engage in Activism Programs: Social Justice or Sanctuary?*
 - Participants attend youth activism programs for social justice work, but also for sanctuary and peer/adult relationships.
 - Youth defined sanctuary as a protected space but also a place that celebrates aspects of identity.
 - Sanctuary and social justice work were intertwined as reasons for attending.
 - Both sanctuary and social justice motivations should be considered in designing youth activism programs.²⁴

- From *Researchers Study What Motivates Rural LGBTQ Youths to Take Part in Activism*

“Helping others and reducing discrimination for future generations were the top concerns. Many respondents indicated the issues they care about affected their friends, so they fought on their behalf as well. Others said they had lived or are still living through various forms of discrimination or harassment, and they want to ensure future generations of LGBTQ individuals do not face the same problems. Generativity, or working across generations, was a key issue. Some respondents indicated they had an older mentor who helped guide them through difficult times. Others did not and wanted to ensure they could act in that role for younger individuals.”²⁵

“It’s great that we have marriage equality, but there are many other forms of oppression still happening. I think these young people weren’t just worried about what was happening to them but issues that affected others as well.”²⁶ - Mike Krings

- From *What Teens Gain When They Contribute to Their Social Groups*

“Adolescents, it turns out, are remarkably well adapted to contribute to others. Adolescence is a time of massive restructuring in the brain, creating a faster, more

efficient system. Neuroimaging studies show that the neural networks that change most significantly during adolescence are the same networks activated by contributing to others. For example, the “social brain”—the intricate network of areas in the brain that activate in social interactions—matures rapidly during the adolescent years. This development increases young people’s ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of other people. Adolescents’ advancing cognitive maturity allows them to consider the complex dynamics of other people’s competing perspectives and needs to determine whom and how to help.

Another area changing during these years is the “reward system,” which increases the positive feelings teens get from new and exciting experiences. This is the brain area most commonly implicated in adolescent risk taking, which strikes fear in the hearts of many parents. But evidence suggests that the same brain changes involved in adolescent rebelliousness and risk taking also drive kind and helpful behaviors, such as contributing.”²⁷

PART TWO: PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

FORMS AND STRATEGIES

Civic engagement and activism come in many forms. There are a number of ways to help youth build their activism skills. Consider the following in the ELP setting.



Promoting Voting and Census Participation -

“Voting and elections happen everywhere and provide valuable opportunities for young people to use their voices and have a tangible impact—and because it can serve as an entry point to other kinds of participation. But young people have political lives beyond the ballot box that meaningfully influence everything from

consumer decisions to media and culture. Some youth (especially, for example, young people of color and/or LGBT youth) may see and experience their daily lives as “political” in ways that shape their views and their engagement in civic life. Beyond politics, many other activities can also be acts of civic engagement: volunteering, working with neighbors, serving in community organizations, participating in social movements, discussing issues, reading the news, etc.”²⁸

Running for office – “Student government provides a chance for students to have a positive impact in their school and learn about how government works on a small scale. It gives youth the experience to reflect on and consolidate their own positions on important school issues, learn how to communicate those positions, build relationships with others and become a good listener in



understanding constituent (i.e. other students) needs. It is also good practice for the future in

getting involved in politics. Students can also become involved in groups like the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), or other task forces that are working to improve their school.”²⁹



Philanthropy – “Raising money is a concrete way for students to contribute to community or national efforts to address injustice. From organizing a bake sale around a local issue to fundraising on a larger scale for a national concern like racial disparities in the criminal justice system, raising money helps students feel like they are part of something bigger and backs the cause. Fundraisers can include selling items, auctions, entertainment, sponsoring events and more.”³⁰

Advocacy – “This helps kids build writing skills, understand local, state, and national government, and allow them to voice their opinions about issues that affect them.”³¹ Advocacy activities can also take many forms.



Greta Thornberg
Sweden
Environmental Activist



Emma Gonzalez
Parkland, Florida
Gun Violence Prevention



Malala Yousafzai
Pakistan
Women’s Rights in Education

- **Educate others** – “As students learn about an issue they care about, their natural instinct is to share their new knowledge and insight with others. Encourage this by providing live and online opportunities for them to teach others, including their classmates, younger students and adults in their lives. This can include school assemblies, community forums, teach-ins, peer-to-peer programs and social media forums. Include opportunities to share the information in interesting ways (written, art, theatre, etc.) and they should also give other students the chance to explore their own thoughts and feelings about the topics. Youth who want to know more may be more likely to learn from another young person.”³²





How Kids Learn Conference VIII – Youth Activist Panel

- **Create a public awareness campaign that includes social media** – “Creating signs and posters using art and photography can be very effective as can videos and live speeches; these are all useful skills that young people can learn. In recent years, the use of social media to raise public awareness has been largely driven by young people and is a useful vehicle for raising issues and effecting change. The use of blogs, social media sites like Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, videos, memes and online petitions are just a few examples of how words travel fast online and can incite quick and effective action.”³³

- **Advocate for legislation** – “The primary advocates for the DREAM Act have been young people known as the DREAMers, who have a personal investment in the issue. With your students, provide opportunities for them to learn about the history and impact of legislative change like the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Help them analyze proposed legislation in relation to their goals and assess the extent to which it will have an impact.”³⁴



- **Do a survey about the issue and share the results** – “Understanding what people think and why is helpful in bringing about social change. Students can learn more about public opinions on issues by participating in surveys themselves and also reading about them. They can also create their own surveys. Using paper surveys or online surveys, students can gain insight into how other students in their school or the larger community feel about an issue. This is useful in organizing others and addressing their concerns and needs; at the same time it builds math, critical thinking and interpersonal skills.”³⁵

- **Write a letter to a company** – “Students can reach out to companies or organizations that they feel have done something unfair or biased. This is something do-able that can make a difference. For example, if students want to change the ways toy companies use gender role stereotypes to package and sell their toys or games, have them write letters to toy or video game companies and explain why they think their practices are biased. In crafting a well-written letter with evidence and a clear statement of what needs to change, students learn useful skills in persuasion and at the same time, it has a made a difference.”³⁶



- **Get the press involved** – “Help students understand that bringing publicity to their issue amplifies the message, gets more people concerned and potentially has a greater impact. They can write a press release, do an interview, write an op-ed in their local paper or invite a reporter to see what they are doing and write something about it. This sharpens their own message and serves to bring that message to a larger group of people.”³⁷

- **Volunteer/ Community Service** – “Youth can engage in community service on issues they care about. For example, if they are concerned about the stereotypes and violence directed at homeless people, in addition to advocating for legislation or attending a demonstration, students can also donate their time to help out in a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Serving the people who are directly impacted gives young people firsthand knowledge of the situation, deepens their understanding and builds empathy.”³⁸



- **Protesting** – “Marching in the streets enables students to express themselves and publicly convey what’s happening while meeting and connecting with other people who feel passionate about the same issues. Demonstrations and protests can be uplifting and empowering and can help students feel like they are part of a larger movement. In preparing to attend a protest, have students consider what their goals are in attending the event and think through what message they want to convey. They can create posters, prepare songs or chants and practice symbolism that conveys their thoughts and feelings. They should consider whether they want to do individually or organize a group of students from their school to go together, make transportation arrangements and ensure that safety concerns are addressed.”³⁹

CHALLENGES, BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of challenges to civic engagement of young people have been highlighted in *Understanding Youth Civic Engagement: Debates, Discourses and Lessons from Practice*. A few of these challenges are listed below.⁴⁰ (Note: Some words spelled below reflect the British spelling as they are quoted from a British publication.) In part 3, you will also find challenges and barriers cited by program leaders.

Inequality - Social exclusion is a critical factor in determining opportunities for and access to routes of participation. People with lower income and education levels are less likely to take part in voting, volunteering and other behaviours. It follows that young people from families with lower incomes are less likely to vote or take part in civic organisations. The uneven burden of poverty and inequality between families depends not only on the availability of financial resources but the interplay with other forms of capital, namely human capital (i.e. qualifications, work history), family and community social capital (supportive ties and networks at home and locally) and local infrastructure (transportation). Such combined assets or resources will influence levels of vulnerability and capacity to participate in other aspects of social life.

*“There are indications that adult attitudes might be changing regarding youth civic engagement. Furthermore, there is a huge civic engagement gap between whites and minorities and/or low-income youth. Why has this happened? Why is there such a gap in civic engagement among our young people? What can be done to make the youth voice an important one in local, state, and national affairs?”*⁴¹ - 4-H

Societal Attitudes to Young People - It is argued that, because portrayals of young people, particularly adolescents, in the popular media can be negative, young people themselves can have low expectations regarding their ability to contribute to society in a positive way.

Adult Control - A further challenge to the civic engagement of young people is ‘adulthood’, the tendency of adults to control the nature and content of young civic engagement activity. In other words, forms of engagement for young people are often designed to replicate adult democratic institutions and are based on adult notions of how young people should participate.

In *Understanding Youth Civic Engagement: Debates, Discourses and Lessons from Practice*, the U.K. authors (note: some words spelled below reflect the British spelling) state, “While a number of models and frameworks for civic engagement programmes are set out in the literature, certain components are consistently identified as core elements in the development of effective programmes. Highlighted below are elements of leadership and skills training that the literature suggests are critical factors in the effective planning and management as well as the design and implementation of youth civic engagement programmes. The section concludes by looking at some of the challenges in evaluation of such programmes.” Below are some recommendations offer from this article.⁴²

Action-Orientated Research - has shown that while young people may be committed to social justice, they do not necessarily consider themselves responsible for doing anything

about the injustices they see. Organised efforts that are grounded in action rather than ideals alone therefore are more likely to resonate with young people. Likewise, numerous research studies have emphasised the importance of experiential learning as part of the leadership development process.

Reflection - Following action, the second and key stage of experiential learning is reflecting on the experiential activity. Experiential learning only happens when a person participates in an activity and then looks back at the experience critically, gains some useful insight by analyzing it, and puts the resulting knowledge to work in everyday life ... The reflection process often requires participants to maintain a journal and to communicate about their experiences.

Relevance to Young People’s Own Interests and Lived Experience - The research literature suggests that young people are more likely to be engaged by and passionate about social issues if they are relevant to their own culture and lived experience. A US study of 12 community- based organisations at which young people actively worked for change, found that young people were attracted by the focus on their own cultures and backgrounds. It was considered important that youth’s own knowledge was valued with young people acknowledged as experts in their own lives.

Incorporate Skills Development - While there is agreement in the literature that leadership programmes should provide opportunities for young people to develop the skills required to take on leadership roles, there is no agreement as to exactly what these skills are. (Researchers) suggest that instruction on leadership development should focus on teaching students how to set goals, resolve conflicts, be assertive, foster teamwork and participation, communicate effectively and run a meeting.

Explicitly Set Out the Degree of Youth Participation - Some studies have emphasised the importance of youth involvement in all levels of youth civic engagement programmes. Involving youth in every aspect of such programmes is a means to provide them with the opportunity to practice their leadership skills. It is argued that a “youth driven model” or “youth led model” will yield the most tangible results in terms of youth development and youth empowerment. It is important, therefore, that civic engagement initiatives are explicit regarding the degree of youth ownership of their activities and their decision-making authority in relation to them.

Provide Opportunities for Youth-Adult Partnership - While youth ownership of civic action endeavours is important, this does not mean that adults do not need to play a role.

Evaluating and Measuring Youth Civic Engagement - Difficulties in defining and conceptualising civic engagement are reflected in the challenge of measurement and evaluation. The complexities associated with evaluating leadership skills and empowerment, for example, are vast. Organisations that focus on supporting personal and social development have long struggled to provide hard evidence of the value of their work. There is a lack of consensus around the outcomes that they aim for and are able to deliver, and a lack of consistency in measuring these outcomes.

The Center for Information & Research (<https://circle.tufts.edu/>) conducted a study of civic learning and engagement projects. Below are some of their recommendations for programs who want to offer civic engagement and activism activities.⁴³

- Define and measure civic learning through an inclusive lens and long-range view.
- Embrace the equity-advancing value of time, flexibility, and depth that out-of-school civic learning can offer to optimize learning and impact.
- Build in a Community of Practice in youth programs to build bonding, linking, and bridging social capital within the Community of Practice.
- Strive for a full partnership with young people through transparency.
- To work towards equity in access to civic spaces, pay young people—especially young people from marginalized backgrounds—for their time spent on civic work.
- Create clear structure and goals, with invitation for co-design and revision.
- Assume plurality in participants' comfort with requesting and sharing power.
- Create an infrastructure and funding for longer-term communities of practice to support youth-driven civic work.

Hiring - We know that the effectiveness and quality of youth program activities rests on the competency of the adult leaders that we hire. What traits are we looking for in adults that will lead youth civic engagement and activism activities?

“In numerous studies, the most highly rated characteristics of effective initiatives all involved characteristics of adults who: 1) relate well to youths; 2) care about young people; 3) are honest and comfortable in talking about issues; 4) are sufficiently trained to implement the program; 5) support and understand the program's goals; and 6) have a good overall understanding of adolescent development. Another important dimension is to seek out adult advisors and youth coordinators who reflect the diversity of the community. Equally important, young people need to see adults exchanging ideas, collaborating and having fun with people from different backgrounds.”⁴⁴

Staff Training - How necessary is it to prepare and train the staff? According to Youth On Board, “Adults need help learning how to collaborate with young people just as much as youths need help adjusting to their transformed role. Even though we all were young once, it is easy to forget. What a difference a few decades make in widening the proverbial generation gap! Adultism workshops by such groups as Youth On Board (www.youthonboard.org) are designed to confront negative stereotypes and unspoken fears about teens. Trainings need to permeate the institution from the boardroom on down. Broader diversity training for staff, board members, youth staff and/or volunteers can be another worthwhile investment—especially if sessions go beyond the issue of age to include socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, regional background, family history, personality type, etc.”

“Staff support for civic engagement and youth activism will look different across different kinds of organizations. Some, for example, are multigenerational political organizations where adults work alongside youth in apprenticeship-type relationships. In these settings, adult should be prepared for a cycle of modeling, coaching, and fading: this involves sharing strategies with youth while also listening and learning from young people as partners in social change. In organizations that are more apolitical or refrain from explicit political activisms, staff should be prepared to facilitate youth decision-making and planning; moreover, staff should not be afraid of situations where youth may “fail” in their campaigns - there is lots to learn from setbacks.” – Dr. Ben Kirshner, University of Colorado, Boulder (From an interview with Temescal Associates)

Volunteering - When you're sending your students off to volunteer, be sure to communicate with the organizations ahead of time to find out what their needs are and consider if your students have the skills and time to fill those needs.⁴⁵

Protest Activities - In preparing to attend a protest, have students consider what their goals are in attending the event and think through what message they want to convey. They can create posters, prepare songs or chants and practice symbolism that conveys their thoughts and feelings. They should consider whether they want to individually or organize a group of students from their school to go together, make transportation arrangements and ensure that safety concerns are addressed.⁴⁶

Legal Implications - Because promoting youth civic engagement and activism activities has real, ethical and legal implications, it is important that program leaders review their activity plans with their adult supervisors (school administrators or agency leaders). According to the Youth Activism Project, “Legal counsel is a must if this is the first time for collaborating with minors. People at youth-serving organizations can lend expertise and common sense on questions surrounding liability, medical release, chaperones, transportation, and organizational policies pertaining to volunteers, especially those under the age of 18. On questions of liability, it is prudent to tap the specialists within the organization and have them review all parent consent forms, even photo release forms, to see if a signature protects the staff and organization of unexpected liabilities in connection with their child's participation.”⁴⁷ A good resource to tap is the Nonprofit Risk Management Center (www.nonprofitrisk.org).

RESOURCES

There is an abundance of valuable resources (articles, websites, studies and program guides) that are available by doing a search on the internet. We also recommend all of the resources cited in the end notes.



We sponsored and conducted a webinar on this topic entitled, *Youth Civic Engagement and Activism in Afterschool*. To view a recording of the webinar, click [here](#).

PART THREE: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Below are excerpts from interviews we conducted with two youth activists, a youth organizer and several researchers on the topic of civic engagement and youth activism. Also included in part three are organizations and program leaders who share their civic engagement and youth activism activities.

YOUTH ACTIVISTS

Ivan Garcia is a youth activist in Oakland and serves on the Oakland Youth Commission. You can learn more about Ivan, by viewing a brief video on Vimeo. ⁴⁸ At the How Kids Learn VIII conference, Ivan was a presenter and panelist on the subject of youth activism. You can read the full interview on our Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Blog.

(<http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/2019/03/an-interview-with-ivan-garcia-youth.html>)



Q: How did you become active in social causes?

A: I first became involved in 2016, following the Presidential Election. All my classmates and I felt that we needed to speak up and use our voices to share our opinions. I took it upon myself, to create a class video, titled “[Dear Mr. Trump](#)” which is a video of our opinions, fears, and hopes for President-Elect Donald Trump at the time. The video has now garnered over 4,000 views and it served as a way for me to connect with many young people who felt as though their voices weren’t being heard.

“I love Ivan. He’s a leader. I can’t wait for him to sit in my office. And I mean be the mayor. He’s going to be an amazing mayor.” - Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf

Q: In your view, why is youth voice and youth activism important?

A: Youth activism, in my view is crucial as it gives young people the opportunity to have their voice heard while expressing themselves in a way that is unique. Being an “activist” can be anything from being an artist to working with lawmakers to create policies that will benefit all people. It also equips youth with many skills that are essential, such as networking, organizing, public speaking, and much more. It’s important for young people to feel as though they have a say in the policies that will affect them in the long run.

Q: What advice do you have for afterschool programs who want to provide opportunities for youth to become actively involved?

A: I would tell afterschool programs to give students the freedom to try different methods of expression. Don’t limit a young person’s perspective and provide safe spaces where they can feel free to be themselves. Creating an environment that encourages truth and honesty can go a long way for young people who want to be active in their communities. Furthermore, I

think it's important to note that adult allies, should support the work of young people, but not take over and determine the way that work should be done. That should be done by the students, themselves. Lastly, bring people in who are doing this work as an example to motivate other students. It's not a competition, but it's one way that students can often see what's possible when they think about more than just themselves.

Q: What activities and issues do you think youth are most interested in?

A: Most recently, I think youth have been invested in gun violence, given the many incidents that have rocked our nation. Following Parkland, many young people created groups and organizations that are still doing meaningful work in their communities. Some other areas of interest for youth, I think are: criminal justice reform, sexual assault and harassment, and education (especially in places where schools are underfunded and under resourced).



Ann Guiam (she/they) is a 20 year old Filipinx youth, from San Pablo/Richmond, CA. She started as a youth intern at RYSE at the age of 16. By going through the leadership pipeline of being an intern to fellow, she is now a Youth Organizing Program Assistant at Richmond's RYSE Youth Center. Ann centers radical organizing for social justice issues by expressing her leadership and diligence through community engagement, youth power advocacy, art (artivism/poetry), fighting against displacement, and more, all with love and solidarity.



Q: How did you become active in social causes?

A: Growing up, I always hear about the social issues that have impacted my homeland, the Philippines, and further into the issues here in the US. I've joined programs and opportunities that have helped me expand my social justice awareness. During my sophomore year of high school, our school Richmond High, was one the local high schools in our district to call on action regarding the election results in 2016. The impact and rage it created in my community showed me how powerful we can be to make a change. It wasn't only adults, the majority of those who showed up and marched in the streets to city hall were youth. The unity I witnessed and experienced motivated me to seek opportunities where I can further see, hear, and be with my community to move into great changes.

In my junior year, I had the opportunity to take on "artivism" by crafting a quilt through the Social Justice Sewing Academy, touching on the issues of gun violence across the nation, by visualizing and questioning the "beauty" of this country, in spite of all the violence impacting the lives of people, majority being the BBIPOC community, both directly and indirectly, while honoring the lives harmed and lost. Later in the school year, the Richmond Youth Organizing Team internship of RYSE was introduced to students through outreach of our Youth Coordinator, Diana Diaz. After learning about this opportunity, I realized this is my time and opportunity to get more involved with social justice and community organizing. As of now, I have been involved with RYSE since April 2018, during which time I have become a youth intern, where I gained connections and chosen family, with people who were also driven and

empowered to be a voice for their community. Now as a staff member, I am a Youth Organizing Program Assistant at RYSE, continuing to be a radical youth and community organizer in Richmond.

Q: What are you working on currently?

A: Currently I am co-planning a summer internship opportunity for youth in Richmond, where they can have a collective space where they can learn and discuss the roots and values of abolition, while getting to know Richmond and creating a space for healing, culture and resilience. Youth also will have the opportunity to create their own transformative campaign and policy for local societal issues.

Aside from this work, I am also part of the *Youth Anti-Displacement*, which is a cohort of Bay Area organizations who are currently working on projects to spread awareness on displacement currently happening in the Bay Area.

Q: In your view, why is youth voice and youth activism important?

A: Hearing, seeing, and feeling youth take action and step out, is one of the most beautiful things to witness in our existence. The power youth hold and deliver is one of the ingredients to liberation. Youth voices are important because we are loud and proud, we are straightforward and know what we want to change, the resilience youth have shown lately is the epiphany of youth power and activism. Youth activism involves actions and views that can be thought of as the alternative perspective to how others may approach certain issues. Youth voices cannot be lowered down because we find ways to be heard, youth are not afraid to stand up for others, and see things fall down. We know a lot of things that are happening will be in our hands until we grow old, we don't only look back at the past to change it anymore, now we make the present matter the most, for it will determine the future.

Q: What advice do you have for afterschool programs who want to provide opportunities for youth to become civically engaged?

A: Encourage youth to decide and take action. Whether it is choosing topics to discuss, or choosing an activity set from their interest in social justice. Seek spaces where they will feel like they belong. Set opportunities where there can be workshops that help youth create their pathways to be involved through their own identities, culture, and challenges. Always acknowledge their own curiosity to things whether it's through their families, friends, schools or communities, where they can find involvement and awareness.

Q: What activities and issues do you think youth are most interested in?

A: Right now, a lot of youth have been interested in learning more about issues on police brutality, racial injustice, environmental injustice, broken healthcare systems, along with other systemic issues, food insecurity, and more. Activities that can tie into these issues can be a workshop for Know Your Rights, learning about systems and how it leads to the Prison Industrial Complex, and more. Other activities can also include ways youth can develop leadership skills and individual skills they want to have or improve, anything that can support their growth and self-power.

Q: Looking ahead, what are your plans for continuing your activism?

A: I see myself getting more involved in my community, through RYSE and other opportunities that may come my way. Richmond or elsewhere, I will continue to walk with

the movement locally happening, finding more ways to serve our youth, adults, and elders. Continuing to be resilient, be with community, seek and make change, keeping the radical fights alive, all through healing and transformative actions, until we reach the liberation our people deserve.



YOUTH ORGANIZER

Jamileh Ebrahimi has been the Youth Organizing Director at RYSE Youth Center since 2012. As Youth Organizing Director, she builds a vibrant youth organizing culture both at the Center and in the Richmond community. Jamileh is deeply committed to education, organizing, organizational and community sustainability, and movement building, and through her 18+ years of community organizing, she has discovered the importance of community empowerment, healthy living, and justice. She works to ensure that young people serve as key stakeholders and decision-makers on issues and policies impacting their individual and collective health and well-being.



Q: Please describe your civic engagement/ activism activities.

A: Over the past decade, RYSE has been reminding those in power that young people are paying attention to how the conditions in California and West Contra Costa County (WCCC) affect them and their families' lives. RYSE leads mobilization work that builds youth leadership and works to pass progressive local and statewide legislation that positively impacts BIYOC (Black, Indigenous, Youth of Color). RYSE 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. Partnerships currently held with youth justice organizations, school districts, education advocacy organizations, and civic mobilization organizations in the region build a shared understanding of the voter power ecosystem in Contra Costa County.

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

A: RYSE host three separate week-long staff development sessions annually, in addition to multiple training opportunities provided for all staff throughout the year. Training includes, but is not limited to: restorative justice, non-violent communication, adolescent brain development, lobbying rules for non-profits, gender justice, and more. 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: Too often in communities like WCCC, where atmospheric violence and harmful health outcomes are prevalent, BIYOC are seen as deficits rather than assets to their communities. In contrast, RYSE views young people as capable of prioritizing what is needed for their lives and communities and of leading needed change efforts. WCCC is a region navigating ongoing disinvestment, particularly in neighborhoods where BIPOC families live.

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: What benefits do kids accrue?

A: RYSE's [Theory of Liberation](#) (ToL) works to transform systems so that BIYOC feel loved. It supports BIYOC's leadership to spark community transformation on issues impacting their well-being. The ToL asserts RYSE's values and principles, and guides our outcomes:

- Youth have emotional, physical, and political safety to acquire tools, skills, and resources they need to understand and change inequities;
- Youth feel loved with the emotional, physical and political safety to acquire the tools, skills and resources they need to understand and change inequities;
- Young people construct their own narrative and those of their communities;
- Systems transformation by youth committed to a platform for liberation in which cultural work and race are central;
- Develop an expanded hub for youth movement building, power building, arts and culture, and protection against further displacement called [RYSE Commons](#).

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.

Q: Can you offer any tips to others?

A: Please read our statement - [Solidarity with Black Youth Organizers: A Call to Adult Allies](#), for ways to show up for Black young people and young people of color to support their physical and political safety. For more information on our work or to schedule a tour, presentation or training, please contact: info@rysecenter.org. To learn more about RYSE, see below.

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Deborah Lowe Vandell has been a leading researcher on expanded learning programs since 1985. Dr. Vandell appeared in our video on the [Learning in Afterschool & Summer learning principles](#)⁴⁹ and our documentary on the [History of Afterschool in America](#).⁵⁰ You can read the full interview on our Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Blog. (<http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/search?q=deborah+vandell>)

Q: Civic engagement and youth activism is an increasing part of afterschool youth programs. Can you comment on this trend as a part of positive youth development?

A: I just returned from a meeting that convened 250 researchers and practitioners who focused on this very issue. A recurrent theme across many presentations (by both researchers and practitioners) was the ways in which afterschool programs can foster civic engagement and youth activism. The connections between positive youth development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and character development were another recurrent theme. It is exciting for me to see connections being made across areas that are too often in separate silos.



Dr. Ben Kirshner is a professor and researcher at University of Colorado, Boulder. Because he is a champion of youth development, youth organizing and participatory action research, we asked him about civic engagement and youth activism. Dr. Kirshner was interviewed on our Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Blog. (<http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/2019/06/an-interview-with-youth-development.html>) Dr. Kirshner also submitted additional responses to the topic of youth civic engagement and activism.

Q: You have studied why youth activism and civic engagement are important avenues for youth development. Can you share some of your findings?

A: In my initial research I wanted to challenge dominant frameworks for youth civic engagement and community service, which were based on middle class and affluent assumptions about “service” and were not capturing the kinds of community resilience and youth activism happening in communities of color.



My research carried out with multiracial youth organizing groups in the Bay Area showed how youth participants developed a capacity for critique and collective agency to challenge unjust systems and negative stereotypes. These developmental achievements, it turned out, also spoke to unique elements of learning environments in youth organizing groups. Through peer-to-peer mentoring, apprenticeship learning, and commitments to young people’s dignity, these settings offer great promise for learning environments in and out of school.

Since then, I've developed more strategic research collaborations with youth organizations and schools, in which we use research to understand and address compelling challenges jointly identified with youth or organization leaders. For example, I was part of a participatory action research team to study the impact of a high school closure on students, which showed students' creative and resilient adaptations but also the stressors that displacement added to their lives.

Q: What is the best age for these civic engagement activities?

A: There is no best age. Elementary age children can participate in various forms of community-building and activism just as older youth can. Of course, as skilled youth workers will know, young people's maturity levels may shape the kinds of roles played by staff and how they support youth voice and engagement.

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

A: Organizations that invite young people to participate in social change do so because they know that youth are key agents of making the world better; young people are agents of change throughout the world! Many organizing groups are motivated more by their desire to build power for social change than by the goal of offering a learning experience for youth. But, consistent with what we know about learning and development, young people end up learning a great deal by participating in social change movements. In other words, sometimes the best learning experiences are those that are not designed with learning as the primary aim.

Q: Please describe any challenges programs should be aware of.

A: I would say the biggest challenge has to do with preparing adults to share power and become skilled at the delicate dance of guidance of and deference to youth leaders - to act in solidarity with young people.

Q: Can you offer any tips to others?

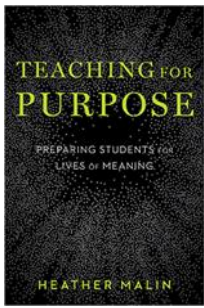
A: For staff and leaders of programs, I think the first place to start is to get clear on what you are comfortable doing and getting behind; if you are inviting young people to participate in an activity, be prepared to act in solidarity with them as they pursue it. Be transparent about the premise of your activities with youth and what they are signing up for.



Heather Malin, Ph.D., is the director of research at the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. Her new book, *Teaching for Purpose: Preparing Students for Lives of Meaning*⁵¹, was recently released. We believe that afterschool programs serving older youth are well positioned to nurture youth and their sense of purpose. Below we share some of Dr. Malin's responses to our interview questions. You can read the full interview on our Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Blog.

<http://blog.learninginafterschool.org/2018/10/preparing-young-people-for-lives-of.html>





Q: How is “purpose” applicable to those who “teach” young people in community and school- based afterschool programs?

A: We’ve found that structured youth programs are wonderful for supporting purpose development when they provide an integrated web of purpose support. That web is made up of a social network that offers encouragement, access to information and knowledge needed to develop an interest and reflect on how their values relate to real-world issues, and opportunities to take authentic action in response to an interest or concern.

Q: The concept of “purpose” joins other new concepts that have entered the afterschool conversation including “SEL”, “agency”, “civic engagement”, “growth mindsets”, etc. How do you see “purpose” aligning with these?

A: I see purpose as strongly interconnected with SEL, civic engagement, and “agency”. I advocate for purpose as a framework for SEL that integrates some of the goal pursuit strengths (self-regulation, agency) with moral strengths (empathy, compassion, social awareness).

Teaching for purpose ideally means providing young people with opportunities for values reflection that strengthens compassion and social awareness along with opportunities to develop important goals and take action. These efforts can help youth exercise self-regulation and agency. Civic engagement is an important way for young people to act on beyond-the-self goals that really matter to them.



Source: www.theatlantic.com

EXAMPLES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH ACTIVISM ACTIVITIES

A number of organizations and expanded learning program leaders responded to our request for examples of civic engagement and youth activism activities in their programs. We present these activities below.

Arc EXPERIENCE, A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

[Arc Experience](#) offers quality outdoor enrichment programs for underserved youth. They participate in civic engagement activities described below.

Contact Person Brad Lupien, CEO, brad@arc-experience.com



Civic Engagement Activity Description Arc youth attend the annual CALSAC Challenge, including but not limited to; having students write postcards to elected officials, staff and students traveling to Sacramento to visit with elected officials and advocate for issues important to their schools, and leading workshops for teens on civic engagement.

Additionally, Arc was part of launching TACA, Teens Advocating for Civic Action. TACA had students meet monthly via zoom since 2018 as a group from across the state to learn about the political process and take action regionally.

Target Audience Elementary through high school.

Time Needed/Frequency Monthly meetings.

Recruitment Strategies Youth recruit youth and civics teachers are engaged for recruitment

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? These activities give youth a voice at a very real level and empowers them at a young age to become involved in the political process. Civic engagement activities include voter registration, contacting elected officials, setting up visits for elected officials at schools, etc, is the definition of experiential education and the LIAS principals.

What benefits do participants gain? Youth empowerment and a sense of engagement at all levels. 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.

How do you prepare staff to lead civic engagement and youth activism activities? Staff co-participate in TACA and CALSAC events to gain experience and receive professional development specific to civic engagement.

Challenges Encountered School districts are conservative when it comes to "lobbying", so we have to educate the local education agencies on the difference between lobbying and civic engagement. And encourage them to think more broadly.

Tips to Others Look for programs and processes that work and make sure to do professional development with line staff who are the kid magnets. They need to re-learn civics too! Look for programs that already exist and join in before trying to start something on your own.

KENTUCKY STUDENT VOICE TEAM

The [Kentucky Student Voice Team](#) supports students as research, advocacy, and policy partners to improve Kentucky schools. Our work centers on the least heard students, as the student voice isn't meaningful when it's only an opportunity afforded to students who get certain grades and come from certain zip codes. We envision a Commonwealth where all school staff—be it cafeteria staff, counselors, or custodians—are equipped to support students. We envision a Commonwealth where legislators co-design policies with young people. We envision a Commonwealth where research is democratized, informing action for justice. We envision a more just and equitable world.

Contact Person Rachel Belin, Managing Partner, rachel@kystudentvoiceteam.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description The Kentucky Student Voice Team supports students as research, policy, and advocacy partners in the efforts to make Kentucky schools more equitable, more just, and more excellent all around. We consist of approximately 100 self-selected students from throughout the state and target an intergenerational audience at the grassroots (school and district levels) as well as the grass tops (policy, legislation). We run a podcast and blog, design and deliver professional development for students, educators, and policy influencers, mobilize coalitions around issues and legislative initiatives, shape narratives through commentary and op-ed writing, facilitate dialogue between young people and education advocates and policymakers, and conduct original education research--among other things!



Target Audience Primarily high school youth.

Recruitment Strategies Since we never turn a student away and by design, have no formal interview or application process, we recruit largely through word of mouth. That said, over the years we have learned to target underrepresented students with direct invitations, contact with adult supports, and extra communication and capacity-building.

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? Students join because they co-design virtually every element of our organization--from programming, to strategic planning, to budgeting, to governance. They join because this organization belongs to them, and it reflects their co-designed vision of what is possible.

What benefits do participants gain? In addition to the benefits described above, 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.

Challenges Encountered Among the challenges are ensuring our team internally replicates the equitable and just practices we want to see in our schools, ensuring as few barriers as possible to participation. Other challenges include managing our real-world activities when our members are expected to be sitting in a classroom--and not navigating their communities--for most of the typical workday. And yet another challenge, (among many) is that while our work is highly collaborative in nature, the culture of most schools that our students are exposed to are highly competitive in nature. And because we define leadership as the ability to bring others along with you, our leaders (who serve without formal titles) are often overlooked by their own schools as accomplished assets.

ASAPconnect, California

[ASAP Connect's](#) vision is to connect, serve, and inspire those who support the 4,500 expanded learning programs across California serving 980,000 children and youth annually. By helping Technical Assistance Providers tap into their passion.



[The BOLD \(Building Our Leaders and Dreamers\) Program](#) seeks to apply all that we have learned from our highly successful School of Leadership & Facilitation and afterschool leadership programs to a diverse group of youth who are participating in expanded learning programs throughout California and who

are eager to build their leadership skills and make an impact in their community.

The BOLD Program engages the youth in exploring their natural strengths and talents, building facilitation skills to leverage throughout their academic and professional careers, establishing mindfulness practices to be fully present in all they do, and building social capital through their growth and actions.

Contact Person Julie Groll, Specialist at ASAPconnect, jgroll@sccoe.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description The youth collaborated on a community project in four teams. They collected student voice regarding their topic through surveys/interviews and created a presentation, then presented to a community member about the importance of their issue, their research, and a call to action. Topics they selected in this inaugural cohort: resources for low-income students, art in schools, reconstructing Eurocentric curriculum, and period poverty.

Target Audience High School Youth

Recruitment Strategies We asked the regional Expanded Learning leads in the System of Support for Expanded Learning to share the application information with their ASSETS grantees. That email pointed students to a web page for more information and to apply.

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? We want to help amplify youth voice. What do they care about? Where can we build bridges to help them have an impact in their communities? The applicants we selected were already involved in their communities in some way or were interested in community involvement. Some may have been initially attracted by the stipend, but they reported that they got way more out of the program than they expected, and they want to do more for their communities.

What benefits do participants gain? They learn strength and leadership skills, they build their network across the state, and their voices are heard.

Challenges Encountered These students are busy and have their time scheduled out with extracurricular activities and work. We had to limit how long our meetings were. There was so much more we wanted to do with them in this first year and couldn't cover it all. We'll make meetings short and more frequent next year.

Tips to Others We had two remarkable college students involved in the design of the program, and they were the direct contacts for the teams to connect and progress in their projects. That was a huge factor in this program's success. The college students had been in afterschool programs just a year prior, and their fresh perspectives were really valuable.

FAB YOUTH PHILLY, Philadelphia, PA

At [Fab Youth Philly](#) we do three things: We *support* youth-serving organizations through a variety of consulting services; we *connect* youth development professionals to training and networking, and we *innovate* summer and afterschool programming for children & teens.

Contact Person Rebecca Fabiano, Executive Director, rebecca@fabyouthphilly.com

Civic Engagement Activity Description Coined after the Block Captain and Jr. Block Captain roles, the [Play Captains Initiative](#) is a workforce development and civic-engagement initiative with the mission to empower and train teens in leadership, playful learning and facilitation to make the Play Streets and neighborhoods of Philadelphia more playful. Our vision is for more playful and engaged communities, where teens are leading the way! [The Play Streets](#) is a summer meal program run by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and we partner with them by assigning our teams of Play Captains to several Play Streets throughout Philadelphia to make the neighborhoods more playful and to engage with children when they get their meal.



During the summer, the Play Captains are placed in teams of five, supported by a Group Leader and spend between 20-25 hours a week in the neighborhood on the Play Streets or at a playground facilitating games, arts & crafts, reading books and more. During the school year, they are placed in teams of 2-5, also supported by a Group Leader and placed in early childcare centers three days per week for about 12 hours.

Target Audience Teens, ages 15-19

Recruitment Strategies We recruit youth in all the typical ways that youth programs recruit teens: by word of mouth between teens, connecting with other youth programs, via social media, we put up posters all over the neighborhoods from where we want to recruit, we do presentations in schools, and host information sessions.

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? Most teens become Play Captains because they are looking for their first job- for more than 85% of the teens this is their first job. And many of them report that they like working with children and wish they had this kind of opportunity (teens coming to their block to play with them) when they were growing up.

What benefits do participants gain?

How do you prepare staff to lead civic engagement and youth activism activities? We train teens ages 15-19 in playful learning, facilitation, leadership, and other workplace skills for them to play and lead games with children on the Play Streets, at playgrounds and in early childcare centers throughout Philadelphia.

Adults receive approximately 60-80 hours of preemployment training, including data collection training facilitated by Temple Infant & Child Play Lab.

Challenges Encountered Staffing this year was a MAJOR challenge, for both adults and teens; inconsistent number of children that come out to the playground and playstreets make it hard for the teens to stay motivated; the heat can also decrease motivation. Fundraising can be a challenge because many see this as an expensive program. The program itself doesn't cost a ton and many things can be donated or can get sponsorship (like their uniforms/t-shirts); what does cost the most is the salaries. This is a workforce development program, so we invest in people. We have low staff/youth ratios, we pay above minimum wage, aiming to get our TEENS to \$15/hr. within the next 3-5 years. They are currently paid \$9/hr. and adult staff starts at \$15-20/hr.

Tips to Others Plan, plan, plan and then be prepared to throw all of those plans out the window. This project relies on many partners and large systems, the more of those you have to interact with the more you have to rely on them. So, deadlines often get pushed, information often comes late, and so we end up grinding the two weeks before the teens start for training because finally all of the information we've been waiting on since MAY, comes through. Once the teens start training and then are on the Play Streets, just lean into it and have fun!

To help others interested in this initiative, we published Play Captain Initiative: Start-Up and How-To Guide. To view the full guide, go to (http://www.temescalassociates.com/uploads/1/1/0/6/110631901/play_captain_initiative_start_up_how-to_guide.pdf)



CALIFORNIA YMCA YOUTH & GOVERNMENT

The hands-on programs of [California YMCA Youth & Government](#) provide positive opportunities and experiences for youth. Participants strengthen their communities by becoming active and responsible contributors who are inspired to lead and are empowered to create meaningful change. This program is conducted by [the YMCA of San Francisco](#) whose mission is to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities by enriching the lives of all people in spirit, mind and body.

Contact Person Jenifer Hughes, Director of Teen Programs, jhughes@ymcasf.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description Our goal is to support youth to grow the skills and awareness needed to contribute actively in creating a more healthy community. Youth have the tools necessary to use their voice and stand up for what they believe in, be leaders and participate in community change, and understand and act on social justice issues. Youth engage in weekly workshops building awareness and providing space for discussion. Youth model different careers such as legislators, activist and community organizers, media, and more. Youth are exposed to project-based learning where they are tasked to research and formulate their own methods of community change.



Target Audience Youth, middle school/ high school. We serve middle and high school youth with an emphasis in identifying young people who come from backgrounds that are historically disenfranchised.

Time Needed/Frequency Each cycle end youth have an opportunity to showcase their projects and act out roles through mock legislative and judicial events. Time for youth and staff consists of weekly meetings and monthly all- day events.

Recruitment Strategies We recruit mainly through two methods; 1. Within their other organization's programs, schools, and services and 2. Word of mouth from youth who have already participated.

Materials Needed Materials span from chart paper and markers to snacks, to venue rental and tech supplies.

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? We offer this program because we believe that civic education and engagement is vital for our youth to understand so they can be civically active adults. We believe youth, who are the next generation of voters and political office holders, should have the tools to make decisions that benefit themselves and their communities.

What benefits do participants gain? 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. Leadership skills like public speaking and collaboration are key to success in the program. Lastly, it is essential for youth to walk away with the experience of creating community with youth of different backgrounds and identity.

Challenges Encountered Youth conflicts can arise when there are passionate differences in opinions. It takes time to be thoughtful in setting up difficult conversations or lesson plans and activities. Many of the topics we cover center around identity and in recent years, we have seen responses to differences in our government and media to escalate into anger and violence. We have to help guide youth to see different ways to engage with someone they feel is acting in attack or dismissive.

Tips to Others Setting up a foundation of safety and support can provide intentional mechanisms for conflict resolution between youth. Provide as much space for youth to take on leadership roles and design programming.



YOUTHACTION NYC

[YouthAction NYC](#) is an afterschool program for high school students interested in learning to be effective advocates for the issues they care about and advocate on behalf of themselves, their schools and their communities. Its parent organization is [Citizen's Committee for Children of New York \(CCC\)](#), is an independent, non-profit, nonpartisan organization and the leading child advocacy organization in New York City.

Contact Person Laura Jankstrom, Director of Civic Engagement Programs, ljankstrom@cccnewyork.org



Civic Engagement Activity Description

Participants learn how to gather information, document what they learn, and then effectively communicate this information to their communities and elected officials. YouthAction NYC includes 3 scaffolded afterschool programs: YouthAction Community Leadership Course; YouthAction Members; and Peer Trainers.

The YouthAction Community Leadership Course is a free 10-week course, held in the fall and spring, which teaches high school

students how to become effective advocates. Students conduct their own research, do public polling, visit community-based organizations, and interview community leaders. They learn how to develop their own solutions to problems that their communities face and meet with elected and appointed government officials to present recommendations for change.

YouthAction Members - After graduating from the YCLC, students are invited to deepen their advocacy skills by becoming YouthAction Members. Members develop their own youth-led advocacy campaigns and participate in CCC's advocacy work directly with CCC policy staff. **Peer Trainers** - This select group of YouthAction participants trains other youth throughout New York City on how to conduct effective

fact-based advocacy and how they can also be leaders of positive change in their schools and communities.

Target Audience High school youth

Recruitment Strategies E-mail blasts to schools and community-based organizations and promotions on social media.

Why do you offer this activity and why do kids join? We offer this opportunity because we believe young people should have a say in the policies that impact their lives, even if they are not old enough to vote. Were students attracted to YouthAction because they had a natural interest in policy and advocacy, or did we inspire them to become more civically engaged? The answer is probably both, and it also depends on the student. Some join because we offer community service credit for participation, some are looking for leadership opportunities, others are recommended by a teacher or someone else who knows about us.

What benefits do participants gain? The concrete skills youth develop through the project-based approach we use have different types of real- world applications. 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.

Challenges Encountered Black youth, particularly boys, are very underrepresented in our program and other programs like it. We need to figure out how to bring more young people to the table so that we are building leaders in every community.

Tips to Others Incorporating meaningful civic engagement opportunities into youth programming is so easy to do! The mechanisms for young people to engage with their elected leaders are the same for adults. Have them create a presentation for their community board, testify at a public hearing, call or write to their elected leaders, create a petition...these are such great projects for young people to do together and you can do so much related skill building as you go through the projects: public speaking, debate, consensus building, media literacy, etc.



CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

[The Careers in Science Intern Program](#) is a work-based youth development program for young people from groups typically underrepresented in STEM fields. This program is conducted by the [California Academy of Sciences](#), whose mission is to regenerate the natural world through science, learning, and collaboration.

Contact Person Laura Herszenhorn, Director of Expanded Learning & Youth Engagement, lherszenhorn@calacademy.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description

Each activity is different and requires different amounts of time & resources. Interns participate in citizen science and have performed KQED youth media challenges. A recent activity conducted data collection and analysis to inform a beach nourishment project by the city.

Target Audience High school youth.

Recruitment Strategies Youth leaders are already enrolled in the Careers in Science program. Youth also conduct marketing and recruitment to their peers.



Why do you offer this activity? We believe that youth have a powerful role to play in the future of our planet. We are committed to empowering youth with the confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to be active citizens and informed decision-makers in their communities.

What benefits do participants gain? Confidence, knowledge, public speaking skills, networking with like-minded peers, the rewarding experience of feeling heard and valued.

Challenges Encountered Our expertise is in youth development and science education. Participants would benefit from more collaboration with experts in government and community organizing.

Tips to Others Youth seem to thrive when there is a clear purpose and overall framework in which they can make choices about what they are most excited to do and how they wish to do it. They are very creative -- give them the space and support to achieve their goals.



THE FRIENDS OF SAUSAL CREEK, Oakland, CA

The Friends of Sausal Creek (FOSC) offer several environmental education/ civic engagement opportunities for young people. [The Friends of Sausal Creek](#) is an environmental organization focused on connecting people to their local creek. In making that connection, they also connect people with other people in their community. They believe that our local natural environment can inspire and recharge us amidst our busy urban lives.

Contact Person Education and Outreach Coordinator,
education@sausalcreek.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description The Friends of Sausal Creek offer several environmental education/ civic engagement opportunities for young people. The most effective way to arrange the participation of young people is to have the Afterschool Director of any local program get in touch with the Education and Outreach Coordinator at FOSC. One option is to have the Coordinator come to the afterschool program site and talk to the kids about the Creek and possibly arrange an educational field trip for them.

Target Audience Elementary through high school.



Recruitment Strategies Outreach occurs with the help of teachers and the schools.

Materials Needed FOSC provides materials and tools for kids to volunteer in the Sausal Creek watershed.

Why do you offer this activity? Our volunteer opportunities allow youth to get familiar with and learn to love and care for their watershed environment. Some schools offer community service points. For others, it's a way for teachers to get the kids out into nature.

What benefits do participants gain? They offer education about the watershed, and the experience of working in it.

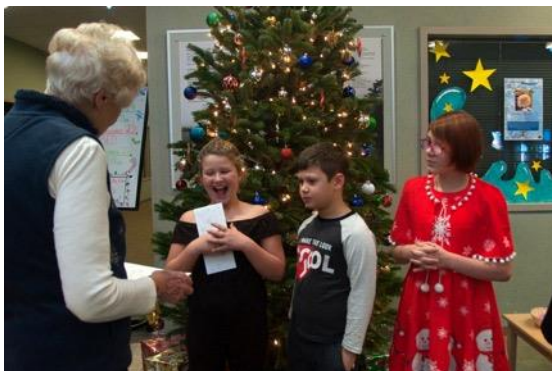
Challenges Encountered Coordination with any given teacher might be a challenge, or occasionally keeping the kids on task.



FORT BRAGG UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, CA

The programs detailed below are provided by [Fort Bragg Unified School District](#).

Contact Person Beth Pine, ASES Expanded Learning Program Coordinator, bpine@fbusd.us



Civic Engagement Activity Description An aquathon is where students get pledges to swim laps in a pool to support universal swim lessons for 2nd graders in the district. Youth in the district also organizes a campaign to raise funds for fire victims. In addition, high school students volunteer time working with younger students to fulfill their community service requirements.

Target Audience Elementary school and high school.

Recruitment Strategies Outreach to expanded day program participants.

Why do you offer this activity? To provide students with opportunities for community building and to foster career pathways.

What benefits do participants gain? Altruism, credit toward community service requirements and fostering career pathways.

Challenges Encountered Program leaders have to encourage follow through. Students often do not complete the activity they sign up for.



4-H, A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

4-H is America’s largest youth development organization—empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. Through life-changing 4-H programs, kids and teens have taken on critical societal issues, such as addressing community health inequities, engaging in civil discourse and advocating for equity and inclusion for all.

Contact Person Rebecca Kelley, J.D., Director of Development, rkelly@4-h.org

Civic Engagement Activity Description 4-H civic engagement programs empower young people to be well-informed citizens who are actively engaged in their communities and the world. Youth learn about civic affairs, build decision-making skills, and develop a sense of understanding and confidence in relating and connecting to other people. 4-H civic engagement program areas include:

- Leadership and Personal Development
- Community Action through Service Learning
- Communication and Expressive Arts



While civic engagement programming takes different shapes and forms across the 4-H system, it is grounded in the philosophy of **service**—to community, country, and the world.

Our model begins with focused attention to 4-H program development that takes into account:

- A young person’s interest or “spark” that is the center of 4-H programs
- The principles of high-quality youth development programs
- The importance of developmental relationships
- The need for sufficient program dosage and fidelity

Civic engagement at the local level: 4-H, as part of the Cooperative Extension System, works with elected and appointed officials at the county, city, and school governance levels to execute a variety of civic engagement programs. 4-H programs use current research to address local needs, and 4-H is uniquely positioned to influence positive change—with access to convene and report to commissioners, local agency heads, and school officials on a regular basis. Most 4-H’ers have civic engagement as part of their project work, even in the Agriculture, Healthy Living, and STEM project areas. 4-H’ers are at the forefront of community service--carrying out beautification projects, responding to natural disasters, establishing community gardens, and distributing resources to low-income families. From building training robots and prosthetic limbs to planning evacuation maps and serving in control centers for wildfires, 4-H’ers are often the people to answer the most difficult calls in their communities. Civic engagement at the local level is a daily activity for members of 4-H. When 4-H is at its best, civic engagement is ingrained into every project in the form of service to their community, country, and world.

Civic engagement at the state level:

Key state program elements include:

- 4-H Day at the Capital – most state programs have a 4-H day at the state capital. 4-Hers travel to their state capital where they learn how to tell their 4-H story to legislators. They meet with their legislators to talk about the positive impacts of 4-H, hear from public officials, and see their legislators in action.

- **State Legislative Days** – many states have created mock legislative programs where 4-H participants spend 2 to 5 days learning about and simulating the legislative process with their peers. This type of program is typically focused on teenage 4-H members.
- **Global Citizenship** – over 20 states have programs that encourage youth to expand their view of the world. State’s 4-H Exchange is an opportunity for 4-Hers ages 12-18 to travel to a foreign country for a cultural immersion experience. The International 4-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) program allows 4-H alumni aged 19 and older to live in and experience another country for up to 6 months.

Civic engagement at the national level: 4-H is delivering high-impact programming to guide youth as positive and informed citizens engaging in civic enterprise. Their experiences at Citizenship Washington Focus, for example, connect them with the workings of government, while in their local communities, youth are providing service and giving back to those in need. Our assets, summarized below, are the catalysts for change.

- 1,500 high school youth each summer participate in intensive week-long experience in Washington, D.C.
- *Civic Education:* Debate current national issues, such as economic development and mobility, and learn how to compose a bill that addresses that issue in their community
- *Personal Development:* Plan and execute events and programs during the week, such as a Town Hall Meeting and Congressional Session
- *Civic Engagement:* Practice public speaking and consensus building to find out what it takes to lobby public opinion to support a bill
- *Service:* Develop of a Community Action Plan, which represents a unique opportunity for youth to build critical life skills, while engaging directly with many of 4-H’s local partners—schools, government agencies, community organizations and civic leaders once they execute it upon returning home

Target Audience 4-H serves youth from age 5 to 18. Collegiate 4-H and alumni programming offers additional civic engagement opportunities.

Why do kids join? 4-H empowers youth to practice and recognize the importance of civic and social responsibility by strengthening their leadership and citizenship skills. It prepares them for life, inspiring them to be invested, informed and accountable for generating the change they want to see in the world—and to create their own success in the future.

What benefits do participants gain? 4-H participants are four times more likely to actively contribute to their communities and two times more likely to get better grades in school.

How do you prepare staff to lead civic engagement and youth activism activities? 4-H developed several program guides to support adult leaders:

- [*True Leaders: Culture, Power, & Justice*](#) is designed to engage youth in critical dialogue and collective action in order to contribute to a more empathetic and just society. This is a Facilitator Guide intended for use with youth in Grades 6-12. Youth have an incredible opportunity to see the world as bigger than themselves. This curriculum offers dynamic opportunities for youth to explore their identities, different cultures, new perspectives, and the histories that have shaped power and privilege within our communities.
- [*Citizenship Adventure Curriculum*](#) is designed to engage youth in changing a piece of the public world, discovering the possibilities of democratic citizenship and building a commitment to taking action in new and exciting ways

Challenges Encountered Youth possess a sense of urgency that many adults do not.

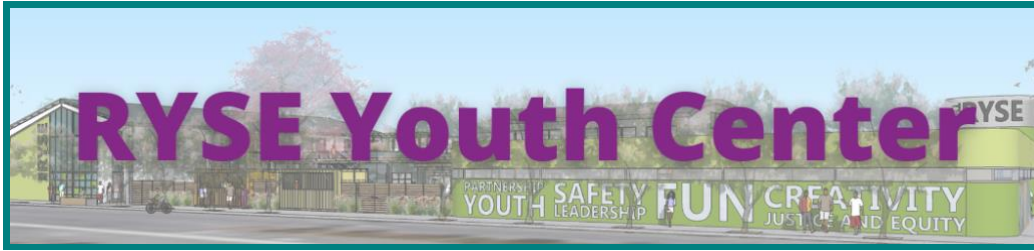
Would you highlight any legal/ ethical issues that could arise? 4-H Extension Agents serve as a “guide on the side” to help youth navigate legal and ethical issues. Youth-led actions can sometimes challenge boundaries, so agents play an important role in educating youth.

Below are some 4-H papers and resources that program leaders may find helpful.

- [Civic Engagement Resource Guide](#)
- [Beyond the Gap](#)
- [Journal of Youth Development papers](#)
- [Journal of Extension](#)



Source: www.florencefirststeps.org



Mission

Through our **Theory of Liberation**, RYSE Center creates safe spaces grounded in social justice for young people to love, learn, educate, heal, and transform lives and communities.

Read more about our Theory of Liberation: rysecenter.org/our-approach

History

RYSE was born out of a **youth organizing movement** initiated in 2000 in response to a string of homicides near Richmond High School. Students organized more than 1,500 youth and adult community members to address the lack of safety at school and in the community. Young people, local officials, and stakeholders partnered to comprehensively assess youth-identified priorities and solutions.

On **October 18, 2008**, RYSE officially opened its doors. Since then, RYSE has **served over 5,000 youth members** and **reached 10,000 more** through outreach, workshops, and community events in Richmond and West Contra Costa County. RYSE helps youth step into their power so they can lead, dream, and love.

Rysing from Center to Commons

Building a legacy of love and liberation. RYSE exists because youth of color called on adults to listen, invest, and rethink young people's place in the city. Over a decade later, our youth are rysing. Their art enlivens the streets and their ideas shape local policies, leading toward a Richmond and West Contra Costa where their stories can thrive. Each year, over 700 RYSE members imagine new paths for social change that benefit all of our communities.

Rysing from Center to Commons. RYSE is deepening roots and raising up a new structure to better hold and amplify youth voice - RYSE Commons. Renovating our existing center into a 45,000 square foot campus will expand youth program and partnership space by over 300%. With more space, we can expand our age range to engage youth ages 11-24. Envision a dynamic campus for young people, grown from RYSE's healing-centered and creativity-led foundation. A hub for personal development, play, expression, incubating ideas, performance, art, launching businesses, exploring tech, and connecting with universities and partners.

Each year, **700+** young people participate in RYSE programs

With RYSE Commons, that number will triple

98% of RYSE members are young people of color

19% of RYSE members identify as LGBTQ+

Stay updated or send a donation at rysecenter.org/rysecommons.

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Website: rysecenter.org

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