

RESULTS-BASED PUBLIC  
POLICY STRATEGIES FOR

# Promoting Youth Civic Engagement

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**POLICY** for **RESULTS.org**

Center  
for the  
Study  
of  
Social  
Policy

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) believes that policymaking should be based on achieving concrete results; and that using reliable data for learning and accountability leads to improved outcomes for all children and families.

Results-based public policy helps policymakers:

- Establish an aspiration that directs policy, budgeting and oversight on the desired result for children and families.
- Use results to drive decisions about policies, programs, practices and the investment of taxpayer dollars.
- Measure progress and assure accountability by using powerful and commonly understood data.
- Improve cost-effectiveness because smart policies that make a difference are essential to the nation's long-term economic and civic health; and leading with results is the best way to make hard spending decisions.

CSSP helps provide state policymakers with research-informed, results-based policy strategies to support child and family well-being in their states through **PolicyForResult.org**. This web-based tool provides guidance on maximizing federal resources and highlights state examples of effective policies and financing approaches; which is critical during tough economic times. This paper is intended to be a companion piece to the [youth civic engagement section](#) on PolicyForResults.org.

Stringent criteria were used to select the indicators and recommended strategies in this paper. For example, the indicators are limited to those for which 50-state data are available and those that research or practice indicates can be improved. All indicators and strategies were chosen in consultation with issue experts and based on specific research regarding their effectiveness. Levels of evidence were identified and used to guide the selection of strategies and recommendations.

We recognize that evidence exists in different forms. PolicyForResults.org relies on three levels of evidence:

- **Rigorous statistical evidence** refers to the most scientifically defensible evidence, which comes through statistical evaluations with control groups, randomly assigned participation, and/or tests of statistical significance. Research of this sort is usually not available, particularly in the fields related to children and family policy. In addition, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting and generalizing findings from this sort of research to entire populations. True random assignment is ethically prohibited in many cases and this limitation must be recognized when interpreting the findings of quasi-experimental studies.
- **Program evaluation and emerging evidence** refers to evidence that is derived from state studies, policy analysis, the evaluations of specific programs and research or extrapolations from related fields.
- **Practice-based evidence** refers to evidence that enjoys broad consensus from practitioners. Practice-based evidence of success and experience can provide compelling evidence, as can research, provide strong, but not conclusive, statistical evidence.

# PROMOTING YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Youth civic engagement leads to reduced risky behavior, increased success in school and leads to greater civic participation later in life. However, youth today are less likely than those in earlier generations to exhibit many important characteristics of citizenship.<sup>1</sup> State policymakers across the country are working to engage youth in positive opportunities for civic participation, which is important for healthy youth development and for the health and performance of democracy.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, in spite of these efforts, a study from the National Conference of State Legislatures found that more young people can name an American Idol winner than know the political party of their state's governor. Furthermore, the study found that many young people between ages of 18 to 24 do not understand the principals of citizenship, are disengaged from the political process, lack the knowledge necessary for effective government and have a limited appreciation of American democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Successful youth engagement strategies require that youth have genuine and meaningful opportunities to work with each other and with policymakers to impact issues of importance. Effective initiatives respect the value of young people in public problem-solving and provide young people and adults with information, tools and support to work effectively together as partners, allowing opportunities for youth to take ownership of parts of the process, mobilize others and become powerful role models.<sup>4</sup> It is important to be inclusive in planning and working with youth, placing particular emphasis on engaging young people who have not traditionally been included in community youth development opportunities and recognizing and valuing diversity (including ethnic, racial and socio-economic).<sup>5</sup> By creating opportunities for youth civic engagement, policymakers promote the healthy development of young people. Civic engagement provides young people with opportunities to gain work experience, acquire new skills, and to learn responsibility and accountability—all while contributing to the good of their communities.<sup>6</sup>

## Measures to Consider

In its report [The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait](#), the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) examines the civic engagement of young Americans and adults across 19 core measures of engagement, as well as attitudes towards government, levels of political knowledge, partisanship and views of elections and politics.

<sup>1</sup> Flanagan, C., and Levine, P (2010). Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood. The Future of Children. [Available online.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Flanagan, C., and Levine, P (2010). Civic Engagement, C and the Transition to Adulthood. The Future of Children. [Available online.](#)

<sup>3</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures (2006). Legisbrief: Engaging Young People in Legislatures.

<sup>4</sup> Bloom, J (2000). Youth Summits: Capturing Youth Voice in Public Policy Debates. [Available online.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Bloom, J (2000). Youth Summits: Capturing Youth Voice in Public Policy Debates. [Available online.](#)

<sup>6</sup> National League of Cities (2001). Promoting Youth Participation.

## *Root Causes of Engagement (and Disengagement)*

**Early Opportunities for Involvement:** In part, the civic skills, habits and motivations of young adults result from opportunities for engagement during childhood and adolescence. Children and teens who have opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities and community institutions are more likely to vote and participate in other forms of civic engagement as young adults.

**Education:** Education has been shown to have a significant impact on youth civic engagement. Research suggests that both the educational experiences of youth themselves and the educational experience of their parents have an impact on whether or not young adults vote. Dropping out of high school decreases young adult voter turnout by 19 percent for white adults, 11 percent for black adults and 10 percent for Hispanic adults. In 2008 the voter turnout for young people without college experience was 36 percent, compared with 62 percent for their peers with college experience. Additionally, parental education has been found to be a more powerful predictor of young adult voting than either parental income or profession. Having well-educated parents increases the normative pressure to be engaged in the civic process, thereby providing youth with an early introduction to civic engagement and establishing voting early on as a important right and responsibility.

**Socio-Economic Factors:** The relationship between social class and political participation has been referred to as the “best documented finding in American political behavior research.” Social and class disparities in civic participation often begin during a person’s teenage years and are intensified by the lack of opportunity to practice civic participation in their communities and schools. For instance, schools in less privileged neighborhoods have fewer opportunities for learning about and engaging in civic activities and service learning.

**Arrests and Felonies:** Participating in civic engagement opportunities as a teen reduces risky behavior. Unfortunately, when teens engage in risky behavior and are arrested, it dramatically impacts the likelihood that they will be civically engaged as young adults. One of the two specific events during youth that are associated with reduced rates of civic engagement, is being arrested (the other is dropping out of high school). Studies, which controlled for both growing up in disadvantaged families and neighborhoods, show that youth who report having been arrested between tenth and twelfth grade – have reduced voter participation by 7 percent for white adults and 21 percent for black adults. Additionally, felony convictions serve as a major barrier for civic engagement, mostly effecting poor people and people of color. Currently, 35 states prohibit persons on parole from voting and 30 of these states exclude persons on probation as well. Four states deny the right to vote to all persons with felony convictions, even after they have completed their sentences. Forty-seven states ban felons from serving on juries, and forty states ban former felons from serving in public office.

### **NEED MORE?**

The above is adapted from the article “[Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood](#),” in the [Transition to Adulthood](#) issue of [The Future of Children](#), which provides great information and trends regarding the factors contributing to voter participation among young adults and the impact on U.S. democracy, including information related to immigrant and undocumented youth.

## **Setting Priorities: Why is it Important That Youth are Prepared to Succeed as Adults?**

Preparing all youth for a successful transition to adulthood is both a key responsibility and an important investment for policymakers. Creating opportunities for young people to grow into thriving adults will increase the well-being of the next generation, and ultimately translate into savings for taxpayers.

When young people become disconnected, policymakers in every state are forced to deal with a range of costly consequences that both threaten individual futures and result in soaring public expenditures. Youth without opportunities or a connection to their communities may engage in negative behaviors including substance abuse, delinquency, risky sexual behavior and dropping out of high school. Alternatively, young people with a clear sense of identity, a positive sense of self-worth and opportunities to achieve are likely to be successful.

### **What are the Key Elements of this Result?**

A successful transition to adulthood for all young people requires:

- Connection to caring, supportive adults
- Opportunities to maintain steady full-time employment or engage in educational training that will create career pathways
- High school diploma or GED attainment
- Opportunities for post-secondary education
- Positive membership in their community
- Options for safe, stable and affordable housing
- Access to health care (physical, mental and dental)
- Opportunities to access behavioral rehabilitation programs in their communities
- Early education on family planning and safe reproductive behavior

# USING DATA

## *How are your kids?*

Using data enables policymakers to examine the data trends within their state and compare these trends with other states and national averages. Considering the data in context, by analyzing the root causes behind the data leads to considering data projections and setting targets for improvement.

### *Projections*

In order to achieve measureable results, it is essential to examine the direction in which a trend is likely to move. Making projections allows policymakers to determine the current and future conditions and to set realistic and appropriate targets. When making these projections consider the following questions:

- What do trends suggest about the current outcomes for children, families and communities?
- What will childhood obesity rates look like in the near and distant future (for instance, after one year, three years and five years) if you continue on the current course?
- Does the projected trend suggest positive conditions for children, youth and families?
- If positive change is projected, is it significant? Is it enough?
- What is the impact on communities, public systems and state budgets?

### *Targets*

Target-setting is an important step in achieving positive outcomes for children, youth, families and the community. In order to achieve better results, leaders can commit to setting a measurable target and a timeframe for its accomplishment. When establishing targets consider the following questions:

- Based on trend and projection data what is an achievable target?
- How will the target be used?
  - As an inspiration for mobilizing public will and action?
  - As a benchmark for measuring performance and accountability?
- Can targets be set for specific groups or regions within the state?
  - How will local targets be incorporated, if at all, into the state target?
  - What support can the state give to local entities to set and achieve targets?
- How will racial disparities, geographic differences and other variations be considered?
- What will ensure targets are appropriately set and used over time?
  - How can you prevent targets from being misused for punitive purposes or from leading to unintended consequences and poor practices?

## The Data

**Rates of Youth Voting and Registration:** These data are percentages of the total 18- to 24-year-old population who registered to vote and who actually voted in elections from 2000 to 2010. Data is from the U.S. Census Current Population Survey.

**Midterm Elections.** Voter turnout in midterm elections (2002, 2006 and 2010 in this data set) has historically been significantly lower than in primary elections. Even at its peak in 1960, the percentage of eligible Americans who turned out to vote in a midterm election never surpassed 65 percent.

### Percent of Total Population (age 18-24) Who Voted

	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
United States	32.3	17.2	41.9	21.7	44.3	19.6
Alabama	39	25.7	42	31.5	51.9	16.6
Alaska	(B)	(B)	(B)	28.3	n/a	17.4
Arizona	21.3	8.9	35.2	18	38.7	25.4
Arkansas	35.4	13	32.9	23.1	30.6	14.6
California	28.4	14.8	35.5	15.5	41.5	21.9
Colorado	28.1	20.6	44.2	21.2	46.5	22
Connecticut	39.5	19.1	37.9	21	44.4	20.9
Delaware	(B)	(B)	(B)	28.9	n/a	23.4
District of Columbia	(B)	(B)	(B)	17.1	n/a	27.4
Florida	29.5	17.8	38.7	19.9	44.4	20.4
Georgia	31.6	19.6	42.2	18.7	44.2	19
Hawaii	16.7	(B)	(B)	13.1	22.4	20.8
Idaho	34.4	16.7	45.8	9.3	n/a	18.9
Illinois	35.6	17.5	36.9	25.4	46.1	19.7
Indiana	31.6	14.6	40.7	24.5	42.6	9.7
Iowa	43.1	21.7	58	29.6	59.2	24.1
Kansas	34.6	20	35.1	20.4	41.3	10.9
Kentucky	32	21.2	53.1	28	46.9	18.9
Louisiana	42.2	23.5	46	26.2	49.2	23.7
Maine	50.8	21.4	58.6	28.3	54.5	31.3
Maryland	34.3	19.5	42.9	19.4	44.2	18.8
Massachusetts	35.6	16.1	41.8	19.1	43	20.7
Michigan	36	20	51.5	23.4	48.6	21.1
Minnesota	44.5	42.6	65.8	15.4	58.6	26.6
Mississippi	42.9	16	50	22.7	49.5	27.8

Missouri	30.1	23.2	49.9	29.3	55.2	19.3
Montana	(B)	(B)	(B)	19.2	n/a	20.7
Nebraska	31.1	17.4	38.6	18.4	41.5	10.1
Nevada	25.8	15.6	38.4	8.3	37.2	22.6
New Hampshire	(B)	(B)	52.8	27.5	57.3	19.7
New Jersey	31.6	10.8	43.1	20.4	45.5	14.7
New Mexico	23	15.3	39.7	21.9	42.5	12.7
New York	28.7	15.1	39	20.5	40.4	19.1
North Carolina	27.2	11.1	38.4	24	48	20.8
North Dakota	(B)	(B)	(B)	41.1	n/a	36.7
Ohio	37	18.3	54.5	26.9	55.7	20.3
Oklahoma	34.8	22.7	39.5	26.4	38.7	17.9
Oregon	34.2	22.4	47.2	15.3	45.2	30.9
Pennsylvania	30.6	15.8	40.7	20.5	50.1	14.9
Rhode Island	(B)	(B)	(B)	22.1	n/a	16.9
South Carolina	37.5	23	42.8	21.6	47.8	31.7
South Dakota	(B)	(B)	(B)	26	n/a	22.9
Tennessee	22.9	12.8	35.4	23.9	39.5	14.7
Texas	27.9	12.8	33.5	27.8	32.7	14.3
Utah	36.5	17.5	47.4	19.5	29.2	10.9
Vermont	(B)	(B)	(B)	21.8	n/a	19.8
Virginia	38.5	13	37.2	24.7	47.9	18.7
Washington	38.1	15.1	48.2	17.7	43	27.2
West Virginia	32.7	13.1	45.9	26.7	48.1	19
Wisconsin	47.8	20.3	57.5	13.2	54.8	22.5
Wyoming	(B)	(B)	(B)	15.4	n/a	16.8

Note: The symbol (B) means that the base is too small to show the derived measure.

**For additional information on trends, as well as for comparative state and national data on the number of youth in this age-group and voter registration rates please see our [PolicyforResults.org](https://PolicyforResults.org) [data section](#) for youth civic engagement.**

# STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*What works?*

## **Strategy #1 - Promote youth voter registration**

By providing youth with ongoing training in civic participation, promoting voter registration and creating opportunities for youth to interface with candidates and elected officials, state policymakers can amplify youth voice and support the formation of life-long voting and civic engagement habits. Youth civic engagement and voting also help hold elected officials accountable to the needs of their youth constituents. Some of the strategies that can be used to promote youth voter registration include:

- ***Provide youth with ongoing training in civic participation.*** Ongoing training in civic participation is essential for youth to feel empowered and capable of engaging in the projects they pursue. States can invest in and coordinate training opportunities in the policy process, government structure and community resources as well as skills like community organizing and delivering presentations to decision-making bodies. In 2004, Louisiana passed legislation (SB 11, Act. No. 596, Sec. 1.) to create a Commission on Civic Education to educate students about the importance of citizen involvement and to promote communication and collaboration among organizations in the state that conduct civic education programs. The **Michigan** House Civics Commission is a bipartisan initiative in which state legislators travel across the state and conduct hearings with youth. Students prepare testimony in their classes, whose curriculum is aligned with the commission’s curriculum, and present it to policymakers. Created in 1999 by Governor Tom Ridge, **Pennsylvania's** [Vote with a Vet](#) program is conducted by the state Departments of State, Education, and Military and Veterans Affairs and pairs youth with veterans to help them seeing the importance of voting and civic engagement.
- ***Require voter education/registration drives.*** Registering to vote at a young age boosts voting turnout in the short- and long-term: in 2008, 83 percent of registered 18- to 24-year-olds voted, and electoral analyses show that voting behavior is habit-forming. However, only 59 percent of eligible voters ages 18 to 24 are registered. State policymakers can require that county elections officials run voter education and registration drives and, as a complement, offer youth preregistration—in which youth are registered before they reach voting age and are automatically added to the voting rolls upon turning 18—to youth in schools and community settings. **Florida** law requires

### **Civic Education Tools**

The vision of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, **iCivics** is a web-based education project designed to teach students civics and inspire them to be active participants in U.S. democracy. It offers interactive games and forums for students and resources for teachers.

**Democracy Class**, a project of Rock the Vote, presents youth with information on registering to vote, voting and organizing voter registration drives in an interactive online tool with music and videos.

Supervisors of Elections to conduct voter education and outreach activities in each public high school and college campus within their county. The state has a long history of youth preregistration, beginning in 1972 and expanded in 2008 to allow sixteen-year-old to preregister to vote. State legislators can also support and fund state-level voter education and registration efforts. The Secretary of State's Office for **Georgia** organizes [comprehensive get-out-the-vote efforts](#) through a corporate participation project, engaging companies in voter education and registration; offers assistance in running local voter registration drives; sends staff to speak to voters and provides sample materials for running voting drives. In addition, the state declared April to be High School Voter Registration Month and provides resources for outreach to youth, including materials specific to registration and debate organization on college campuses.

- ***Organize candidate forums with youth.*** To directly engage youth in the electoral process and hold candidates accountable to their youth constituents, state policymakers can organize candidate forums with youth. Such forums enable youth to identify issues of importance to their community and peers, question candidates and educate themselves and others about the voting process. During the 2010 election campaign, over 400 youth leaders in **Massachusetts** participated in the gubernatorial candidates' forum on youth issues. Sponsored by the Lenny Zakim Fund, co-chaired and facilitated by youth leaders and [covered by state and local media](#), the forum focused on funding, legislation and policies related to providing youth with experiences that promote healthy development and youth violence prevention.

### Looking for Resources?

*Project Vote offers a suite of materials on youth voter registration, including model bills, sample testimony, research, fact sheets and other useful documents on related topics, such as pre-registration.*

## **Strategy #2 - Establish opportunities for authentic youth voice in government**

Institutionalizing youth voice in the policymaking process both engages young people and helps policymakers make wiser investments and policy decisions responsive to youth needs. By creating formal youth advisory councils and involving youth in local mapping and planning efforts, state policymakers encourage youth participation and enable youth to identify ways in which policies and programs can better serve their needs. Youth-run grant programs allow youth to shape policy and programmatic priorities and empower peers through funding their projects while learning firsthand about funding processes. Some of the strategies that can be used to establish authentic youth voice in government include:

- ***Create and support state youth advisory councils.*** To ensure the voices of youth are heard and play a meaningful role in shaping youth policy, state policymakers can pass legislation to create statewide youth advisory bodies, such as youth councils, that work with legislators, executives and state Children’s Cabinets. Such state-level youth advisory structure institutionalize youth voice in the policymaking process. **Maine’s [Legislative Youth Advisory Council](#)** allows its youth members to conduct public hearings, draft legislation and make recommendations on proposals being considered by the Legislature.<sup>7</sup> The council is co-chaired by a member of the state legislature and a young person, and members of the state’s Children’s Cabinet regularly attend the Youth Advisory Council meetings.<sup>8</sup>
- ***Involve youth in local mapping and planning efforts.*** To better understand the resources available to youth in their communities and to ensure that community development reflects the needs of youth, state policymakers can support involving youth in local community mapping and municipal/state planning efforts. State policymakers can facilitate and fund [Community Youth Mapping](#), a process developed by the [AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research](#) that enables youth to evaluate and analyze local resource and develop recommendations for future funding, development and policy. The [Texas Workforce Commission Youth Program Initiative](#) offers [training and resources](#) to local communities to facilitate their youth-led processes of mapping services for youth. In addition, state policymakers can require the inclusion of youth in local planning processes. In 2004, **Louisiana** passed the [Children and Youth Planning Boards Act](#), which mandated that local jurisdictions create children and youth planning boards (CYPBs) to assist in the assessment, alignment, coordination and measurement of all available services and programs that address the needs of children and youth.
- ***Establish/support youth-run grant programs.*** States can create and support youth-run grant programs that enable young people to create funding priorities and criteria, design and review applications, award funds to youth projects and monitor and report on the implementation of proposals. Such involvement amplifies youth priorities and their implementation while allowing youth to deeply engage in policy, planning and decision-

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<sup>7</sup> Ferber, T., Gaines, E. and C. Goodman. NCSL. “Positive Youth Development: State Strategies.” 2005. [Available online.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Gaines, E., Faigley, I. and K. Pittman. The Forum for Youth Investment. “State Children’s Cabinets and Councils: Elements of Success Issue 1.” 2008. [Available online.](#)

making with their peers.<sup>9</sup> The [Arizona Governor's Youth Commission](#), comprised of youth commissioners from across the states, is responsible for administering grants for youth-driven projects, such as the Alcohol Retailer Mapping in Proximity to Youth Mini-Grant.

For information about existing statewide youth advisory councils (as of 2009), their administrative oversight, funding, staffing and responsibilities, see NCSL's [Statewide Legislative Youth Councils Chart](#).

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<sup>9</sup> National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families. "Authentic Youth Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders." 2010. [Available online](#).

### **Strategy #3 - Promote diverse forms of youth service**

Youth who participate in diverse service activities are more likely to become engaged in the community and are more likely to develop a long-lasting sense of civic responsibility. Engaging youth in a range of service options allows for them to develop skills and gain experience, while giving back to their communities; it also allows for states to undertake needed projects while providing young people with opportunities for out-of-classroom learning. Young people who participate in diverse service opportunities have higher academic achievement and an increased interest in furthering their education. Providing diverse opportunities for youth to engage in service is a strategy that promotes the development of a new generation of caring and experienced citizens, activists and volunteers. Some of the strategies that can promote diverse forms of youth service include:

- ***Fund school service-learning programs.*** Coordinated by the school system and integrated into the academic curriculum, school service learning opportunities are programs that combine meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich students' learning experiences, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. By providing funding for service learning opportunities in schools, state policymakers help to encourage students to become engaged citizens. The **California Dunes Restoration Project** is a partnership between California State Parks and all sixth grade students at Carpinteria Middle School. This service-learning project helps California State Parks restore the local dunes at Carpinteria State Beach and complements the California State Science Framework.
- ***Organize a state community service campaign.*** In addition to integrating opportunities to serve in school curricula, states can provide direct opportunities for youth to serve their communities. This strategy provides youth with the opportunity to learn new skills through participating in state established projects. States can reach out to youth and create networks to encourage and support service projects. Activities could include coordinating efforts across the state, creating a central source for information about service opportunities or leading a public awareness campaign. **Indiana's Volunteer.IN.gov** website links individuals who want to volunteer but do not know where to begin with organizations in their community that can help them find the perfect volunteer opportunity. The Volunteer Indiana Initiative is supported through the state Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.
- ***Host a state youth summit.*** State policymakers can organize youth summits as a way to consider youth views on upcoming policy and planning decisions, to provide for learning around a particular issue of interest or as a way to kick-off a new youth focused initiative. Youth summits provide a forum for youth to serve as resources to states and allow for youth to contribute in a positive and productive way.<sup>10</sup> The **Minnesota Youth Legislative Summit** is an example of a "Youth as Resources" program designed to involve youth in public problem-solving.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> National League of Cities (2001). Promoting Youth Participation.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom, J (2000). Youth Summits: Capturing Youth Voice in Public Policy Debates. [Available online.](#)

#### **Strategy #4 - Promote policies to support youth engagement**

By promoting policies that support youth engagement, policymakers ensure that youth are able to participate in both guiding policy and participating in the voting process. By recognizing the valuable and unique experience and knowledge of youth and providing concrete ways for youth to participate in guiding policy, states ensure public problem-solving is more comprehensive. Some of the strategies to promote policies supporting youth engagement include:

- ***Create a state-wide youth bill of rights.*** Identifying and articulating the basic rights of children and youth, through a youth-led process, is another way state policymakers can engage youth in policy and planning decisions. A youth bill of rights raises awareness about youth issues and provides a way for young constituents to be engaged. A youth bill of rights can be broad and encompass issues related to all youth or can be used to ensure the rights of youth in subpopulations, such as young people in the care of the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. The **Maine Youth in Care Bill of Rights** provides youth with a resource they can use to advocate for themselves, to make sure that their rights are being honored and upheld and to improve the foster care system for current and future foster youth. These rights are defined in Maine law, through a state policy and in a statement of belief.
- ***Support policies to encourage youth voting and increase access.*** Eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds move about three times as often as older voters, often times to attend college or for a new job. By streamlining the process for youth voters to re-register and vote and by promoting voter awareness around state rules and regulations, policymakers ensure young voter participation is maintained or increased.<sup>12</sup> **Minnesota** has [same-day registration](#), allowing young people to register and vote on the same day, ensuring they are able to participate.<sup>13</sup> Online voter registration, implemented by 10 states, simplifies the registration process by allowing citizens to submit their registration applications using the internet; this accessibility is particularly important for reaching youth voters, as recent Pew Research Center research shows that 95 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds go online, and online registrants are disproportionately younger. Not only do voters who register online vote at higher rates than those who register through other methods, but online registration saves states money—Oregon, for example, used online registration at a cost of less than \$1 per voter registration transaction, compared to \$7.67 per transaction by other methods in the 2008 election.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Pre-Registration**

Several states (including Delaware, Hawaii, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia) allow youth to pre-register at age 16. Pre-registered voters are automatically added to voting rolls when they reach voting age and are sent information about how and when to vote in their first election.

[FairVote](#) provides a [fact sheet](#) on the issue and advocates that this low-cost or no-cost reform will simplify the registration process and increase youth participation.

<sup>12</sup> MGSC Partners (2008). Keeping Young Voters Engaged: 2007-2008 Re-Registration Test Program. [Available online.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Darrow, C. (2003). Best practices: Non-partisan Guide to Voter Registration. Youth Vote Coalition. [Available online.](#)

<sup>14</sup> "Voting System Scorecard: Are states serving the rising electorate?" Rock the Vote. June 2011. [Available online.](#)

## Success Story: Washington

Washington State's comprehensive efforts to support youth civic engagement recognize the power of youth mobilization, the importance of genuine youth voice in policymaking and the significance of quality civic education. Washington's voter-friendly policies made it the highest-scoring state on Rock the Vote's [Voting System Scorecard](#), a national benchmark that measures state laws and policies in three key areas (voter registration, casting a ballot and young voter preparation) and evaluates states' implementation of policies that increase access to the political process.

**Authorizing Online Voter Registration.** In 2007, the Washington State Legislature authorized online voter registration and the Department of Licensing (DOL) decided to implement an online fully paperless system for collecting and forwarding voter registrations at DMVs. Since this shift, voter registrations at DMVs increased from 27 percent of all registrations in 2008 to 70 percent of all registrations in 2009. Over 200,000 online transactions (registrations, address updates, etc.) were conducted in 2008, and 18- to 24-year-olds submitted nearly one in three of these transactions.<sup>15</sup>

**Establishing a Youth Legislation Advisory Council.** In 2005, [legislation](#) established the [Washington Legislative Youth Advisory Council \(LYAC\)](#); [another bill](#) was passed in 2007 to extend LYAC through 2009, and [SSB 5229](#) was passed in 2010 to LYAC indefinitely. Comprised of 22 members ages 14 to 18 who served two-year terms, LYAC advises the legislature on proposed and pending legislation, including state budget expenditures and youth policy, and conducts an annual seminar for legislators. The Council polls students across the state to identify its legislative priorities for the coming year; in 2010, LYAC's legislative priorities were barriers to education (including gang violence, issues related to school health and dropout prevention, intervention and reengagement), internet safety and environmental concerns. In 2009, LYAC hosted a [Civic Engagement Forum](#), which brought young people from dropout prevention and school health programs to advise LYAC, provided training in leadership skills and organized an advocacy day during which youth visited legislative offices.

**Enhancing Civic Education.** The Washington State Legislature offers [several civic education resources and opportunities](#) targeted to young children, teens and college students. Sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of State, an annual [Mock Election](#) serves as a non-partisan educational tool for students grades K-12, and thousands of students participate each year. [Just 4 You](#) is a portal of civics education resources and event and voter registration information for kids, and the [College Civics Ambassador Program](#) engages college students in organizing campus voter registration drives and civic education events.

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<sup>15</sup> Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. 2010. "Voter Registration Modernization in the States: Washington." [Available online](#).

*Success Story: Washington continued...*

The state legislature also offers multiple resources and trainings for civic teachers. The [Legislative Scholar Program](#) provides social studies, history, government and civics teachers from across the state an opportunity to learn first-hand about the state legislative process and the ways in which the Legislature and the state Supreme Court interact. The program equips teachers with valuable resources and ideas to more effectively teach civics in their classrooms. State legislators participate in [Legislators Back to School](#), a national civics program that brings state legislators into classrooms to talk about the legislature and educate students on the legislative process and political careers. The legislature also hosts [Civic Education Day](#), during which civic education-related organizations display tables offering civic education resources for educators and the public, breakout sessions offer hands-on learning opportunities, and a private luncheon is held to honor the Civic Educator of the Year.

[Engaged: Students Becoming Citizens](#) is an ongoing civic education series presented by TVW, Washington's public affairs television network. The series shows students across Washington State learning about and participating in politics and government. In addition, the Office of the Secretary of State offers several other [videos about voting and elections](#).

**The Washington Bus is nonprofit organization run by and for youth in Washington. Youth volunteers, interns and staff aim to give youth a voice in state politics by travelling around the state and organizing canvassing and registration events and offering civic education presentations to schools and community groups.**

# IMPLEMENTATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND FINANCING

*How can you ensure and sustain success?*

## **Implementation**

Because of the variety in proven interventions, states and communities have leeway to find programs that suit local values, opportunities and budgets. The key is to select strategies that have documented effectiveness, assure that they are implemented well and recognize the critical importance of a strong commitment to continuous program improvement.

- **Match expectations with sufficient resources.** Be clear about the goals, purpose and target audience for specific programs. Provide sufficient resources to ensure fidelity to the evidence-based model or modify expectations to accommodate variances.
- **Identifying barriers.** Effective policy development requires the identification of factors that may impede effective implementation.
- **Make provisions for broad-based input.** When involvement will increase the likelihood that the needs of children and families are being met by the policy, engage community stakeholders (children and youth, parents, schools, service providers, faith leaders and community groups) in implementation.
- **Support local capacity and communication.** Provide technical assistance, monitoring and oversight to local programs and agencies. Create opportunities for local-to-local communication, best practice sharing and local input on state policy decisions.
- **Support ongoing evaluation** and continuous program improvement.

The **Washington, D.C. [Youth Advisory Council](#)** ensures broad-based input by establishing membership criteria that leads to a diverse and representative advisory group. The council consists of 32 members, between the ages of 13 and 22, selected from various sectors of the District (3 members from each of the 8 district wards and 8 at-large representatives who have experience with the juvenile justice system and foster care system). Membership reflects a broad range of diversity encompassing but not limited to relevant differences such as ethnicity, location of residency, religion and gender. The Youth Advisory Council advises the Mayor, the District Council, DC Public Schools and other key decision-makers in the community and District government.

### **Considering Racial Equity:**

Does this policy take into account differences in cultures and community norms?

Will/Is this policy improving racial equity?

## **Accountability**

Evaluation is essential for successful policy implementation and to ensure intended outcomes. Accountability requires determining whether programs are implemented correctly, the right programs and strategies are used, progress is measured appropriately and children and families are benefiting. This is established through both monitoring results (what we are trying to accomplish) and monitoring performance (how we tried to accomplish it).

- **Monitoring Results.** Through data, other information and consultation, it is possible to determine if the results we set out to achieve for children and families have been attained. By reexamining the selected indicators we can measure our progress toward the desired result.
- **Monitoring Performance.** Oversight requires policy-makers to determine if policy objectives have been achieved by focusing attention on the performance of specific programs or agencies. This involves reviewing individual programs and their impact on the lives of the people the program is designed to serve.
- **Assign responsibility for realistic outcomes.** Responsibility for outcomes should be designated based on the appropriate roles, resources and capacity of public and private stakeholders.
- **Establish oversight bodies** that consistently review key actions by state agencies.
- **Measure and report progress** to stakeholders and the community. Require public availability of data to allow administrators, policymakers and the public to measure the state's progress on key outcomes.

### **Considering Co-Investment**

Are we consulting with appropriate experts, advocates and constituents?

Are we ensuring that families being consulted and that their views and experiences are being considered?

## **Financing Options**

In order to ensure that state policies are sustainable it is important to consider ways to both maximize federal resources and to utilize public-private partnerships. To that end, there are several opportunities to support state efforts to promote youth civic engagement. For example:

### **More Information**

The [Arsalyn Program](#) of Ludwick Family Foundation encourages young Americans to become informed, active participants in the electoral process with the goal of ensuring that voting becomes a lifetime commitment on the part of our nation's young adults. Arsalyn provides technical assistance to youth and adult representatives of organizations working on civic and political engagement among young people grades 5-12 and/or ages 11-20. The organization also provides [arsalINFO](#), an online database of organizations promoting youth civic and political engagement.

### ***Maximize Federal Funds.***

The [Community Service Block Grant](#) is a formula grant available to states through a Department of Health and Human Services application process. Funds can be used, in part, for strengthening educational opportunities and providing services and activities that help low-income individuals achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community.

[Learn and Serve America](#) is a discretionary project grant that supports high quality service learning projects that engage students in meeting community needs with demonstrable results while enhancing students' academic and civic learning. Funds are used to support professional development of faculty and staff to conduct service-learning courses, projects or research. Funds may also support costs of projects that engage college students in service learning, which may include tutoring and mentoring, health outreach and education, primary and preventative health care, neighborhood clean-up and revitalization and gang violence and substance abuse prevention. Funds can be spent on youth development in order to provide: academic support, career exploration, character building, civic education, delinquency prevention, evaluation, leadership development, mentoring, planning, coordination, collaboration, recreation, fitness, substance abuse services, system building services, technical assistance and training, vocational training and community service.

[The National Guard ChalleNGe program](#) conducts a National Guard civilian youth opportunities program. The program uses the National Guard to provide military-based training, including supervised work experience in community service and

conservation projects. The program focuses on civilian youth, aged 16 to 18, who have dropped-out of high school in an effort to improve their life skills and employment potential. It is the responsibility of a state's governor to establish, organize and administer the ChalleNGe program. Funds can be used, in part, to provide academic support, career exploration, character building, civic education, GED classes, adult basic education, job placement, leadership development and vocational education.

The [Work Investment Act \(WIA\) Youth Activities Program](#) is formula block grant that includes a coordinated system to help low-income young people between the ages of 14 and 21 define their educational and career goals. Service strategies, developed by workforce providers,

prepare youth for employment and/or post secondary education through strong linkages between academic and occupational learning. Funds may be used for education including basic and remedial education, work experience and occupational skills training, mentoring, tutoring, counseling, internships and support services such as leadership development, decision-making and citizenship skills. To be eligible, youth must be 14 to 21 years of age, low-income and face at least one of the following barriers to employment: deficiency in basic literacy skills, a school dropout, homeless, a runaway, a foster child, pregnant or a parent, an offender or require additional assistance to complete their education or secure and hold employment. At least 30 percent of local youth funds must help those who are not in school.

### ***Utilize Public-Private Partnerships***

**[The W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)** supports efforts to increase and diversify civic engagement by and for vulnerable children and families. Kellogg focuses on three key objectives: catalyzing civic engagement so that communities mobilize voices, resources and solutions to improve the lives of vulnerable children; accelerating emerging philanthropic partners, tools and possibilities to increase community philanthropy and foster new models; and increasing the effectiveness, collaboration and community responsiveness of philanthropic and non-profit anchor institutions.

Through its community engagement investments, **[The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#)** fund efforts to enable all residents to participate in their communities and to assume the full rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

**[The Case Foundation](#)** champions of all strategies that deepen civic engagement and put “citizens at the center” of finding solutions for problems that affect them, their communities and society. The Case Foundation launched its first public grants program, inspired by **[Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement](#)**, in response to findings that many people felt disconnected from public leaders, institutions and each other and did not believe they had the power to make a real difference in their communities.

### **TIP:**

Youth can play an important role as trainers for state and local government, assisting in orientation and staff development by providing a youth perspective and strategies for engaging youth in policy and government accountability.

## **FINANCING PRINCIPLES: What Does It Take to Invest in Results?**

*While the above are financing options to specifically promote youth civic engagement, there are some universal guidelines around funding that should be considered with any results-based public policy initiative.*

**A compelling vision.** Powerful visions – such as clear and compelling goals for improving children’s lives – are magnets for resources.

**Aligning financing with results.** The goal is to invest in policies, programs and practices that research and experience indicate will contribute to better results for children. Policymakers can act to ensure that desired results drive financing, instead of available funding driving policy and programs.

**Effective use of existing resources.** The number one financing priority is to use resources that you already have to pay for better results. Fiscally responsible approaches that are accountable to taxpayers focus on spending existing funds in more effective ways.

**Packaging financing.** No single financing approach will support the change required to achieve ambitious targets for improving children’s lives. The best results are accomplished with financing packages that draw from a wide array of resources, instead of getting stuck on a single funding stream or financing approach.

**Leveraging resources.** Even small amounts of money can be leveraged to have positive impact. For example, grants from foundations or the federal government can provide seed money for shifting investments.

**Local-state-federal-private financing partnerships.** Federal policies, funding streams and regulations have an enormous impact on the well-being of state residents. Likewise, communities are dramatically affected by both state and federal financing. While cost shifting across levels of government can have dire consequences, carefully crafted agreements developed in partnership can provide powerful incentives for change.