



**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

Institute for  
Emerging Issues

# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE TOOLKIT

PRACTICAL HELP FOR  
GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

**Prepared by Barbara Steele, IEI Public Policy Intern**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>About the Institute for Emerging Issues .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About the 2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About This Youth Civic Engagement Resource Toolkit.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Practical Strategies & Tools for Engaging Youth .....	4
Examples of Organizations Engaging Youth.....	5
<i>Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Generation Citizen.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Girls for a Change.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>iCivics.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>North Carolina Organizations Engaging Youth.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Opportunity Nation .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The Mission Continues .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>TurboVote .....</i>	<i>7</i>
Examples of Foundations Funding Youth Engagement .....	7
<i>Carnegie Corporation .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Case Foundation.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>WK Kellogg Foundation.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Additional Resources .....	8

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR EMERGING ISSUES

The [Institute for Emerging Issues](#) (IEI), a non-partisan public policy organization, exists to enhance North Carolina's long-term prosperity. IEI connects North Carolinians across sectors, regions, and perspectives for collaborative work on key emerging issues affecting our state's future economic competitiveness. As a unit of North Carolina State University, IEI advances the University's research, service, and outreach contributions statewide.

## ABOUT THE *2015 NORTH CAROLINA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX*

Produced in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, the [2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index](#) (CHI) highlights extraordinary opportunities to strengthen our communities, lift our statewide economy, and improve the bottom lines of businesses of every size by improving "civic health." In sponsoring this report, the Institute for Emerging Issues extends its tradition of helping North Carolinians identify consensus strategies for enhancing our future economic prosperity.

What is civic health? It is the social and economic vitality that results when citizens actively engage in public issues, involve themselves in community institutions, and interact productively with their neighbors. Communities with high levels of civic health benefit from strong social networks characterized by trust and common purpose. These networks offer essential advantages, including an enhanced innovation capacity that bolsters economic resilience and increasingly drives wealth creation. Improved civic health has proven to be a powerful potential economic differentiator.

Key findings of the CHI report indicated that civic participation varies by group. Efforts to enhance civic health must include outreach to under-engaged demographic subgroups, including:

- Youth and young adults
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Low income families and individuals
- Low education families and individuals
- Rural and urban communities

## ABOUT THIS *YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE TOOLKIT*

This *Youth Civic Engagement Resource Toolkit* (CERT) was produced by Barbara Steele, Public Policy Intern for IEI. It provides step-by-step strategies, creative ideas, and practical examples for successfully engaging youth and young adults in civic activities. A full version of the CERT that addresses all the demographic subgroups identified by the CHI will be available via IEI's website soon.

We've combed the nation to find organizations and funders who are inviting young people to become actively involved in their communities. The groups and resources found in this toolkit are intended for illustrative purposes and not as an endorsement of any particular program. We're inspired by what we found and hope you will be, too!

## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES & TOOLS FOR ENGAGING YOUTH

*The very process of engaging young people can be enriching in itself. Rewards go beyond that to diversifying and amplifying participation, bringing in fresh perspectives, and adding energy to the team. This section of IEI's Youth CERT offers a collection of resources with ideas to spur creativity, "how-to" blueprints, strategies, considerations, and activity planning and engagement tools, along with a number of questions and answers that will help you think through issues and possibilities.*

**Engaging Youth in Heart & Soul Community Planning:** Why should you or anyone else devote time to youth engagement? The **Orton Family Foundation** (OFF) answers that crucial question and others with a [resource handbook](#) that offers an array of in-depth tactics and tools for engaging youth. OFF notes that young people who participate in community activities benefit personally by being socially productive: they develop a democratic or civic mindset and build leadership skills; they gain experience and confidence; they are directed towards relationship building; they gain respect and recognition from peers and adults; they are empowered to improve themselves and the communities they live in; and they enhance their resumes for future jobs or college applications. This handbook makes the case that these outcomes have lasting value for the young people themselves, and for the community as a whole.

**New Generation Initiative Community Engagement Guide:** North Carolina's Rural Economic Development Center has produced a [detailed training manual](#) that presents valuable approaches for engaging youth and young adults. They address such fundamentals as authenticity; identifying who, when, and how to engage; barriers to engagement; sustainability; and assessment.

**A How-To Guide for Adults on Involving Youth in Community Planning:** [This guide](#) by the **California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development** is an excellent overall resource on youth engagement. It outlines concepts and rationales for youth engagement, provides examples and case studies, and includes project planning tools.

**A Community for All Generations — Teens and Adults Working Together:** **Everyday Democracy** has written a [discussion guide](#) designed to create opportunities for teens and adults to talk together, and find ways to make communities places where young people can grow up successfully. Many public issues involve and affect both young people and adults, but there is often little chance to work *together* on community problems in a positive and respectful way. Study circles provide a way for community members of all ages to talk respectfully and solve problems together. Through study circles, adults and teens can form new relationships and build a community where everyone thrives.

**Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change:** Produced by **The Forum for Youth Investment**, the principles contained in [this guide](#) can help build the capacity of organizations and communities to ensure that all youth, particularly those least likely to succeed without help, believe that they have the responsibility and resources needed to make their communities better places for themselves, their families, and their peers.

***Guide to Authentic Youth Engagement:*** The National League of Cities' (NLC) [guide to youth engagement](#) is geared toward a local government audience. It was informed by a year-long process using the knowledge and expertise of more than 300 youth development experts, academics, municipal leaders, community organization partners and young adult and youth leaders from across the nation through a series of focus groups, surveys and interviews conducted in 2008 and 2009.

***Building Effective Youth Councils--A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making:*** This [additional resource](#) from NLC is designed to help states and localities create or strengthen their own youth councils. This report provides a general framework for thinking about youth councils, explaining the principles for youth action and the importance of youth engagement. It also incorporates advice and lessons from people in the field who have started or currently staff youth councils across the country. See the [NLC website](#) for additional tools and resources identifying strategies and opportunities for youth engagement.

## EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGING YOUTH

***For a community to flourish, everyone needs to be represented. By engaging young people, we send the message that they are also part of our community. They are our future citizens, heads of families, civic leaders, teachers, business owners, entrepreneurs, and public servants. Working with young people creates stewardship, ownership, respect, and a sense of pride in our communities. Many organizations recognize this and are using a wide variety of methods to reach youth and young adults. Here are just a few examples that may help prompt new ideas for your own application.***

### CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools was created to expand and improve civic learning in our schools from K-12 through higher education. The Campaign works with the 60+ coalition partners comprising its steering committee to bring about changes in state, local, and national policy that promote civic learning. [Guardian of Democracy: the Civic Mission of Schools](#) provides a comprehensive look at the role civic learning plays in maintaining our democracy. The report examines major problems confronting civic learning, offers six proven practices in effective civic learning, and provides recommendations for policymakers, educators, and citizens.

### GENERATION CITIZEN

[Generation Citizen](#) aims to strengthen our nation's democracy by empowering young people to become engaged and effective citizens. Through direct engagement in real-world advocacy, students gain the civic knowledge, skills, and motivation necessary to effect change in their communities. Near-peer college-level "Democracy Coaches" and teachers help close the civic engagement gap by teaching students how to harness the power of our democratic system to make a difference in their own lives.

## GIRLS FOR A CHANGE

[Girls for a Change](#) is a national organization that empowers girls and young women to lead social change within their communities. The program inspires girls to have the voice, confidence, and problem-solving capacity to speak up, be decision makers, create visionary change, and realize their full potential. Girls for a Change provides resources and facilitates collaborative youth-mentor partnerships with professional women. These mentors are trained to serve as powerful role models, advocating for and guiding girls seeking to tackle issues within their own neighborhoods and beyond. Girls for a Change is committed to instilling civic engagement in young women while fostering personal growth and practical skills grounded in relevant community-based action.

## iCIVICS

Founded in 2009 by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, iCivics uses interactive lessons, games, and other activities to make civics education more engaging and give students the tools and knowledge needed to understand and address contemporary issues and concerns. To reinvigorate civics education, iCivics has developed a series of [online role playing games](#) that give students the task of making the hard decisions required in a democratic society.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) helps leverage philanthropy to break the cycle of persistent inequality. The NCRP promotes justice, equity, and opportunity, and believes that public education strengthens democracy and the economy. [Confronting Systemic Inequity in Education](#) offers two high-impact strategies for education grantmakers to more effectively address the root causes of intergenerational inequalities. It recommends a deliberate focus on the needs of students from marginalized communities and on supporting efforts that seek to influence education policy through advocacy, community organizing, and civic engagement.

## NORTH CAROLINA ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGING YOUTH

The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center has aggregated a collection of [organizations that engage youth](#), ranging from America's Promise Alliance to YouthBuild USA. While many of them are national in scope, each of these has a significant North Carolina-based presence.

## OPPORTUNITY NATION

Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national coalition of more than 300 businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions, and community leaders working to expand economic opportunity. Using the lens of the [Opportunity Index](#), a data-rich tool that measures the conditions present in communities that expand or restrict upward mobility, the organization issued a [report highlighting how civic engagement](#) may help youth, particularly low-income teens and young adults ages 16-24, build social capital and skills that can help them find meaningful educational and career pathways. The analysis also found that two forms of civic engagement – volunteering and membership in a civic or service organization – are significant predictors of economic opportunity.

## THE MISSION CONTINUES

**Focus:** Many veterans struggle to find the same purpose at home as they found in the mission, camaraderie, and structure of the military. Through service, veterans find renewed strength and purpose while building stronger communities. The Mission Continues vision is fueled by a deep belief that our veterans are assets. They award [community service fellowships](#) to post-9/11 veterans, empowering them to transform their own lives by serving others and directly impact their communities. They mobilize wide-ranging support from volunteers, non-profit organizations, and donors. Through this unique model that provides reciprocal benefit for the veteran and the local community, veterans volunteer to help others and, through their service, build new skills and networks that help them successfully transition home.

## TURBOVOTE

[TurboVote](#) helps high schools, colleges, and universities improve civic engagement on their campuses and promote electoral participation as a mechanism to achieve broader learning objectives. Currently focused on the under-represented college demographic, TurboVote intends to expand its operations and methods to engage all citizens. They seek to revitalize a stale, antiquated democratic process by engaging 21st century technology and modern digital culture. Other resources include the [Voting Information Project](#), and [new tools for local election administrators](#).

## EXAMPLES OF FOUNDATIONS FUNDING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

***We all know that great ideas often require real money to put them into action. Philanthropists large and small understand that funding youth-oriented programs is a vital investment in the future of our nation. Here are a few of the foundations across the country that support such projects.***

### CARNEGIE CORPORATION

In 2001, surveys showed that Americans under the age of 25 were less likely to vote than their parents, or young people of prior generations. Even though many were volunteering and joining in community activities, the connection to civic engagement hadn't broadened into greater participation in public life. New strategies were needed to educate the country's youth and fully prepare them for responsible citizenship, but experts couldn't agree on what approach would work best. To find the answer, the Carnegie Corporation created a [new area of democracy grantmaking](#) aimed at identifying and jump-starting the most effective approaches to civic education.

### DRAPER RICHARDS KAPLAN FOUNDATION

DRK is a global venture philanthropy firm committed to making a real difference in the world. Their model and point of view directly borrows from a venture capital legacy to find, fund, and support truly exceptional social entrepreneurs who want to make the world a better place. They deploy these resources in a [select group of social enterprises](#) with equal doses of multi-year unrestricted funding and relentless on-going support through active board service.

## THE CASE FOUNDATION

The Case Foundation's work generally falls into three pillars: revolutionizing Philanthropy, unleashing entrepreneurship and igniting [civic engagement](#). The interplay among the three pillars is where they believe real impact can be made to improve the human condition, reduce social and economic inequalities that erode the social fabric, and build partnerships and communities that ground peaceful and prosperous nations. Since 2010, The Case Foundation has supported the [Millennial Impact Project](#), a platform through which feedback was collected from more than 17,500 Millennials. This effort has resulted in a pivotal series of studies exploring how this generation connects, gives, and gets involved with the issues they care about. The research is complemented by the Foundation's continued sponsorship of MCON, an annual gathering that brings together cross-sector leaders to explore new strategies and insights in Millennial engagement.

## WK KELLOGG FOUNDATION

The WK Kellogg Foundation concentrates its resources within the context of families and communities to dramatically reduce the vulnerability caused by poverty and racial inequity over time. Within and around each goal are commitments to [Community & Civic Engagement](#), to create the conditions under which all children can thrive.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **All Together Now: Collaboration and Innovation for Youth Engagement (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2013)**

[This report](#) of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge offers recommendations for national, state, and local policymakers; school districts and educators; and families and communities.

### **Civic and Political Participation of Millennials (New America, 2014)**

[Report on trends and considerations](#) for engaging millennials that includes scoping the outlook for current conditions, participation rates, the policy landscape, and challenges to address.

### **Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth (Earthscan, 2002)**

This [practical manual](#) offers inspiration to all who believe in the value of community education and empowerment as a fundamental building block of a vibrant and resilient civil society.