YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
A Guide to High Impact Investments

Today’s young adults are less engaged in civic and political activities than the generation before them. Fewer are entering adulthood with the civic knowledge and skills needed for active and engaged citizenship.

- A large share of youth are only minimally engaged in their communities, and many others remain uninvolved in civic or political life.

- Civic engagement, as measured by activities such as voting and volunteering, becoming increasingly stratified by age, education, and income. There are significant gaps in the levels of civic participation between older and younger adults, richer and poorer, and citizens with greater and lesser levels of education.

- While most students in US schools continue to be exposed to Civics and American History, the large majority of young people graduate high school with only a basic level understanding - or less - of key concepts and institutions in American Democracy.

- Active and informed youth are significantly more likely to vote, volunteer and support their communities as adults. Civically engaged youth are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to succeed in school.* As stakeholders in our communities, young people also bring an important perspective to civic life and public policy.

Voting and Volunteering by Income, Education, and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income/Education Level</th>
<th>Voting (% of Eligible Voters)</th>
<th>Volunteered in Past 12 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) High Income (&gt; $100K)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Low Income (&lt; $40K)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) BA Degree or Higher</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) HS Diploma or Less</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Older (45 yrs +)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) Younger (18-24 yrs)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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* Study from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (November 2011)
For more information on youth civic engagement please see: Fault Lines in Our Democracy (2012), Civic Engagement and the Changing Transition to Adulthood (2009), and The Nation’s Report Card: Civics 2010.
Strong Youth Civic Engagement Programs Should:

A) Create opportunities for youth voice and involvement in governance
   - Support expansion of student participation in school governance.
   - Promote youth voter registration, including youth voter registration drives.
   - Support policies aimed at increasing youth voter participation.
   - Promote youth involvement in community governance, including creation of youth advisory councils and youth representation on local governing boards and planning groups.

B) Expand and improve civic education
   - Incorporate civics into state and national education standards.
   - Support professional development for teachers focused on civic learning.
   - Promote web-based learning experiences.
   - Develop curriculum that incorporates current local, national, and international issues.
   - Support authentic assessments of civic learning (performance evaluations and portfolios).

C) Provide more hands-on, authentic civic learning opportunities in school and the community.
   - Support in-school and after-school programs that include voting, mock trials, debate, legislative deliberations, and diplomacy (model legislatures and UN).
   - Expand youth service and service-learning programs that engage youth of all ages in working to solve real-world problems.

To help youth become active citizens, communities need to provide multiple opportunities for civic engagement and learning, beginning at an early age. The most effective strategies combine civic learning with opportunities for youth to apply their knowledge and skills to their communities.

For more information please visit:
The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy
415 South Street (MS 035) | Waltham, MA 02453 | 781.736.3772
sillerancenter.brandeis.edu
Prepared in partnership with the Center for Youth and Communities

* The Sillerman Center draws upon scholarship and practitioner experience to engage and inform members of the philanthropic community committed to moving social justice work forward.