

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN 2022

Providing Civic Engagement Tools to Youth in Leadership Development

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 includes a comprehensive youth employment program, which includes 14 program elements. One of these program elements is leadership development. Under leadership development, programs are encouraged to facilitate activities focusing on community service, leadership, and decision-making. In addition, **civic engagement**, defined as activities which promote quality of life in a community, are included in leadership development.

Due to the rise of social media platforms and digital engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth civic engagement and civic participation have shifted. Youth are increasingly engaged in civic activities online. According to Tufts University Center for Information on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), “43% of 18- to 29-year-olds said they saw election information on Facebook, 39% on Instagram, and 37% on Twitter.”¹ Civic engagement activities conducted by WIOA programs need to incorporate how youth are currently engaged in civic engagement, including online and offline forms of civic participation.

Strategies for Civic Engagement

WIOA programs face unique challenges in preparing youth to be civically engaged community members. To meet these challenges, WIOA programs are encouraged to do the following:

- **Encourage youth to take advantage of online voter registration** (e.g., vote.gov), which has risen in popularity during the pandemic. Youth can register to vote, find their polling location, and access other forms of voting assistance online.
- **Encourage youth to reach out to their local, state, and federal officials.** Many officials have emails/phone numbers that may be more accessible to youth. By calling/emailing their Congress representatives on specific policy issues, youth can express their concerns or support to their elected legislators quickly and more effectively.
- **Support youth in finding the issues they are passionate about,**² which has been shown to illustrate youth willingness to act on issues of importance to them. Further, provide opportunities

¹ Junco, Rey, Peter de Guzman, Kristian Lundberg, Abby Kiesa, and Alberto Medina. “Early Takeaways on What Worked to Reach Youth During the 2020 Election.” *Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, January 25, 2021, www.circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/early-takeaways-what-worked-reach-youth-during-2020-election

² Kahne, Joseph, Erica Hodgins, and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl. “Redesigning Civic Education for the Digital Age: Participatory Politics and the Pursuit of Democratic Engagement.” *Theory & Research in Social Education*, vol. 44, no.1, 2016, pp. 1-35, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00933104.2015.1132646.

for them in their issues of interest; e.g., if an individual is interested in environmental issues, connecting them to a tree conservation organization to assist with beautification. .

- According to past research in the *International Journal of Communication*,³ there is a positive association between online civic engagement and offline political participation; this association grows stronger for low-income individuals. However, social media can deter youth from civic engagement, due to the divisive nature of participatory politics, trolling, and echo chambers. Research in the journal *Nature*⁴ has shown that **personalized social media interactions and online interactions between individuals with strong offline relationships boost civic participation for all parties.**
 - To mitigate all of the detriments of social media-based civic engagement, programs might consider creating designated groups or pages (e.g., Instagram pages) for youth to discuss issues in their community.⁵ Thus, youth will be insulated from the negative effects while focusing on community-based civic issues.
- Misinformation is rampant online and **youth benefit from training on identifying trustworthy sources of information.**⁶ Programs may support youth in developing a “healthy level of skepticism” when reading online materials. The following are some tips to share with youth:
 - Searching laterally – cross checking the reliability of sites with other sites
 - Exercising click restraint – being a more discerning consumer of search engine results pages
 - Reflecting on thought processes – understanding personal biases to better discern online materials
 - Adopting “critical loyalty” – having strong beliefs, yet still evaluate an argument or source critically (related to understanding personal biases)
 - Practice – give youth plenty of opportunities to discern trustworthy/non-trustworthy sources and discuss how to overcome biases in a safe place.

Tools

- [The Digital Civics Toolkit](#) – The Digital Civics Toolkit is an online resource with modules on digital civic engagement for youth. The modules take youth through how they can participate, engage, and take action through digital media. Modules cover exploring key issues, understanding trustworthy sources, how to voice opinions online, and how to take action on civic issues.

³ Adegbola, Oluseyi, and Sherice Gearhart. “Examining the Relationship Between Media Use and Political Engagement: A Comparative Study Among the United States, Kenya, and Nigeria.” *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 13, 2019, pp. 1231-1251, www.ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/10501.

⁴ Bond, Robert M., Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D. I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jaime E. Settle, and James H. Fowler. “A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization.” *Nature*, vol. 489, no. 7415, 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3834737/.

⁵ O’Brien, Joe, Nick Lawrence, and Michael J. Berson. “Youth, Social Media and Digital Civic Engagement.” *National Council for Social Studies*, 2018, www.socialstudies.org/position-statements/youth-social-media-and-digital-civic-engagement.

⁶ Hodgins, Erica, and Joseph Kahne. “Misinformation in the Information Age: What Teachers Can Do to Support Students.” *Social Education*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2018, pp. 208-211, 214, www.socialstudies.org/social-education/82/4/misinformation-information-age-what-teachers-can-do-support-students.

- [The Town Hall Project](#) – This resource provides town hall information for federally elected officials; youth can sign up and take part in town halls in their area, engaging in face-to-face conversations with their elected officials. This can be helpful for youth looking to get more involved with their federal Congresspeople.
- [YouthLead Civic Engagement Resource Toolkit](#) – This is a resource guide on civically engaging underserved communities. While it does not focus on digital civic engagement, it does provide helpful frameworks, research insights, and examples of successful programs for youth civic engagement.
- [Tufts Center for Information on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#) – This institute includes several articles about youth civic engagement, including data-backed articles on digital youth civic engagement.

Additional Resources

- [Vote.gov](#) – This website provides voter registration information for all 50 states and territories and provides links to state-specific webpages and forms.
- [UNICEF Report on Youth Digital Civic Engagement](#) – This report shows how youth around the world remain civically engaged online, providing valuable research and practical insights for digital civic engagement.
- [Global LEAD Toolkit](#) – Global LEAD (Leadership and Education Advancing Development) is a USAID-led collaborative initiative which aims to engage young leaders worldwide to guide their countries' progress on key political, social, and environmental challenges. This toolkit provides resources on creating more opportunities for youth participation and leadership in their communities.