

YOUth Matter!

A practical guide on how to empower youth.

How might civic educators create spaces to encourage young people to engage in political topics that are important to them? This short guide based on promising practices outlines the result of an exchange between civic educators in Germany and the United States on how to support youth civic engagement.

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1. Introduction

From the outset of our time together as a working group within the TECE project, we noted an interest in reflecting specifically on how to empower young people. As individuals, we work directly with young people, some of us through state government, others through higher education, through non-profit organizations, and even internationally. Despite operating in different work contexts, we identified common challenges as well as common values and principles that guide our work. One similar aim is to create empowering spaces for youth within our civic education and youth work programming, with the ultimate aim of broader civic change and productive youth/adult partnerships. After a process of identifying different national discourses and respective approaches around youth empowerment, our group realized that rather than setting out to learn from existing approaches, we hoped to work together, with our diverse set of backgrounds and experiences, to develop a new way of thinking about this work. With this in mind we have created a short guide that is the result of our joint work with the aim of approaching this topic with an international and multidisciplinary perspective.

“If we want to see change in our lives, we have to change things ourselves.”

— Grace Lee Boggs

Adults often describe young people as the future, or the cause of problems in the present. When viewed without reflection, both can be true. For us, most importantly, these common ways of describing young people reveal how the metaphors we use to understand

young people frame and structure adult understanding of young people, and the opportunities adults create for them. How we understand and then define young people has consequences for them, and, consequently, for adults, too. As the definitions of “youth as the future” or “youth as a problem” illustrate, much of the time our definitions are reductionist. To further distance young people from adults, we hold adulthood to be the goal of most programs, thereby framing young people as “not adults” rather than people who are young. Common understandings, common sense, and common practices work within a reductionist frame that limits what is available for young people. It also reveals how power works within age-based opportunities and how it shapes relationships between young people and between young people and adults.

To add another layer to the issue, adults prioritize age in the programs and opportunities we create, often requiring a certain age to participate or limiting participation to a certain age. This practice is so common that we frequently don’t even think about it when program admission is defined by age. We should ask ourselves whether the age restrictions are pedagogically motivated, or whether they are simply based on the requirements that the funding institutions have established.

The presence of power within adult/youth interactions and relationships remains invisible. We take for granted that adults have responsibility and young people learn to be responsible, assuming these refer to separate practices. This creates structures focused on the future, ignoring the current needs and capabilities of young people. Educational systems structure students’ schedule into spaces where adults primarily make important decisions. These same systems also perpetuate inequity based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and so on.

The systems we create for young people should reflect and allow diversity, and difference must be embraced; otherwise, our full humanity is denied. Even in civic education, adults often relegate young people to beneficiaries or participants and rarely invite young people to be co-creators involved in the design, leadership, and evaluation of the effort. If we want a world where people, especially young people, can provide their experiences to help guide the decision-making that creates our worlds and impacts our lives, we have to see clearly how we function and how we invite or don’t invite people to participate. All people, young and old alike, can begin by learning and practicing self-awareness and reflection. This provides us an authentic space to think critically about common sense to begin to change how we do our work.

We must be accountable for how we show up, serve, and provide for young people. We can create a project or program and open it up to young people. However, young people stay and are retained by the connections they make. Furthermore, we as adults, create and make systems. These abstract places we call systems can make people feel a sense of belonging, accountability, and ownership to create motivation for the investment of our time and efforts. This is also true for people who happen to be young.

“A seed has no energy of its own, but it can respond in the right environment.” — Helminski

If we want a world more inclusive understanding of all people, we must address how young ones can or cannot help us in this process and ask why. This guide is a collective work of youth educators with different backgrounds, who have gathered our best practices to work strategically to create welcoming spaces for young people that foster empowerment, agency and enable critical thinking. Above all, we want to create opportunities for young people to show that we trust their leadership skills. Our purpose with this document is to provide a source of inspiration for creative ideas to nurture youth-focused programs that are inclusive, engaging, and sustainable.

We would like to provide you tools that can be adapted to different contexts and ways of working. Likewise, we are also aware of the knowledge and experience you bring to the table as a practitioner, taking this into account we want to encourage you to add it to this guide, adapting it to your context. This is your invitation. Let's co-create together! Youth matter and YOU do too.

2. Promising Practices in Youth-Adult Partnerships

As adults who partner with youth, we have a vested interest in ensuring that we follow best practices to create mutually beneficial partnerships. To investigate best practices, we conducted a focus group with 22 professionals working in different areas of the civic education field: universities, nonprofit organizations, and government in the United States and Germany. Our goal was to utilize the knowledge and expertise of the adults to map how youth participate in the matters that affect them and why they may not, what have these professionals have learned about how to support full political participation of young people, and what adults and young people have done that has invited, enriched, and sustained young people's civic engagement. In five groups made up of four to five people each, the participants answered the following questions:

- How might we create spaces to encourage young people to engage in political topics that are important to them?
- What are the barriers to being able to do this?

Using the collect and cluster method, we invited groups to discuss the questions and then write responses on cards. People were asked to exhaust their answers, and found that our groups created between 10-15 cards with responses to the questions after their conversations. This is the collect aspect of this method. These cards were then gathered, and the groups analyzed them for emerging themes - the cluster part. We jointly analyzed the responses and clustered them into those agreed-upon themes, which became the base for writing a guide to design youth programs.

2.1 Principles and values for designing programs

Creating opportunities for young people to engage meaningfully with political issues can be structured and scaffolded. Below we provide some principles and values that we have collectively identified and defined as a starting point. Values are the origins from within our minds that inform how we will manifest those concepts externally as an action in our work, cultures, relationships, etc. In our work and in the data gathered from others, we begin with sharing the principles and values intended to motivate young people to actively participate, but to make this possible, we encourage the promotion of non-hierarchical spaces.

Accessibility. In order for youth and other marginal voices to show up and contribute to work, we must think about changing our structures and cultures to allow this to happen. It is not enough to keep inviting people and to simply make sure doors are open. It requires, rather, that we meet young people where they are and allow them to lead. This enhances not only accessibility, but ownership of spaces. Young people face many barriers to engaging in political topics that are important to them. In creating opportunities for young people, it is important to keep in mind the barriers that prevent some from participating – i.e., transportation, meeting time, location, exclusive and alienating language and words, and common perceptions of young people as deficient, developing, or “not ready for serious work.” All of this coalesce to create an inaccessible program. By working to create and shape the aspects of the program that we can control, there is more time to respond to the elements that are beyond our control.

Flexibility. Being responsive to external factors is critical. What is happening in the world and in the community impacts people’s lives and could also influence programs, so being prepared to make adjustments and stay flexible is essential. This ensures that the work with young people is actually addressing and meeting their needs.

Participation. Seeking youth perspectives on how they want to be included, asking what they want, and giving them the chance to create change are essential. With these perspectives considered, it becomes easier to design a participatory program to assess the needs of young people. This includes thinking about the ways in which you are inviting them in to a particular role: being informed, being consulted, sharing decision-making, initiating and directing the work, etc.

Imagination. Allowing ourselves the freedom to understand, we can create a world and future that better serves us all. There is power and birth in creating. Instead of being in a space of reacting and surviving, we can move into a space where we generate and create better systems and cultures to thrive as people through embodiment. Social and civic imagination are stimulated by questioning the known and the familiar, by relating them to new contexts on a trial basis, and by testing them in new interpretations — an expansion of mind/self/awareness.

Trust. How do we see young people? Do we recognize their agency? Allowing youth to make mistakes knowing this actually deepens our learning and creating safe spaces to allow them to try again and again is at the core.

The initial questions and ideas and principles and values presented here are an introduction we have created to more fully reflect on our roles as adults working with young people. We invite you to continue reading the next sections to find more source of inspiration for the practice.

3. Getting Started

We stand behind the idea that design requires iteration and experimentation. While we might spend weeks and even months designing a curriculum, we have also learned that even the best designs require adjustments and refinements. A promising practice is to plan enough to get started, but not so much that you don't have space for participants to change the design. Once you have started the internal prep-work, your group can get going! We recommend that you put your initial ideas into public space and allow others to respond and even invite them into crafting the next stage.

It doesn't matter if you identify or don't identify as an educator, curriculum designer, coordinator, or youth worker. If you have the commitment to learn from young people and the desire to build opportunities for their involvement, you have the capacity to engage in this work. If we are working or providing something for others, we are engaged in design. Maybe it is in the format of a conference, seminar, or program. We are making something!

How do you get started on making? Begin with designing your project rooted in our values. We offer guidance in the form of questions that both invite reflection and intentionally encourage you to take action:

- Are you doing things at youth? Are you working for youth? Are you working with youth? Is the work led by youth? If not, can you find some who will partner with you in designing the project?
- What is your objective? Begin with your objective – have enough space to try, fail, learn, and try again.
- Who are you trying to engage? Get to know your target group, what are their needs? Answer these questions:
 - What is their background? Are they primarily working class, immigrants, first-gen, etc.? How do they identify themselves? What is their primary language? Why is this the group you are engaging?
 - What do you want them to get out of the program?
 - What other influences are there? Stakeholders? Partners?

Once you answer these questions, you can use this to inform the design of a safe space according to the people who will be a part of this project. After building or identifying an objective around your program/activity and the target group, you can begin thinking about how we can get youth to head into that direction. And we say “head into that direction” because you need to honor the reality that everyone is starting where they are at and their journey and learning will look different.

4. How do we create brave/safe spaces?

Safe spaces are based on trust, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. They are spaces in which participation is voluntary and in which participants can share without being judged. Here, there is tolerance for mistakes, but also a willingness to address them in a constructive and transparent manner. The goal is to share the work with others, to collaborate, co-create, and invite others to offer their talents and strengths to benefit the collective work.

- Anticipate barriers to entry, both structurally and socially – this creates better conditions for youth to show up as they are
 - Where are young people at? Why or why not?
- Set the tone – be as transparent as you feel comfortable and humanize yourself to young people. You should always be honest, with however much you share. How do you expect them to share and be honest, if you can't?
- Invite people to co-create the space. For example, community agreements, you can use these questions to co-create the community agreements: How do we want to work together? What do you expect from the organizers? What do you expect from the other participants?
- Continue the welcome after the invite. Be self-reflexive and model.
- Give the participants tools they can use and practice.
- Allow space for practice.
- Provide the grace for mistakes.
- Affirm their confidence/esteem and allow them to explore their ability and curiosities without judgment.

4.1 Relationship building

Peer mentoring, recognizing young people as individuals and avoiding adultism are key elements to consider in order to build a horizontal and respectful relationship.

How can relationship building be centered in the work? We mentioned earlier that ultimately we want youth to engage, feel empowered, practice critical thinking, and recognize and use their agency. All people, especially young people, have an intuitive sense of whether a place or program is something they are interested in being a part of. We are responsible to craft this space with others using our design principles. Then enact, practice, and embody through relationship building. If you don't know the young people, you won't know what knowledge they have and bring to the table. This takes time! If you have a program that extends over a period of time, spend time at the beginning of the project to get to know young people and have young people get to know you. This allows you to see them, what they are curious and care about, what experiences they have had, what stories they know, and what they have to offer. Get to know young people as people. They have whole lives that come with joys, obligations, anxieties, and dreams.

People will not engage if they do not feel safe enough. This can look like feeling safe enough to show up as their authentic self and begin to engage. Facilitators can support this by engaging youth in skill-building activities. These activities not only build relationships, but

also prepare them to take courageous and independent steps towards accomplishing their desired goals and objectives. In most cases, young people have smart preconceived ideas of what they want but not all of them have the courage to take the required actions, therefore offering support to them is significant.

Recognizing and treating young people as individuals is significant. Relate with young people as individuals, avoid generalization. While we recognize affinities do connect individuals, we also know that people react and respond differently to the same experience. Don't assume you know anyone without first listening to their personal story. This applies to communities too, every approach must be remodeled, and adapted for use by respective communities while minimizing assumptions as much as possible.

Relationship building requires cultivating a genuine extent of trust and trust should be deeper than just believing in people but also investing in them resource wise, and at the same time integrating them into the decision-making process as a way of validating their contribution to the system.

Create a youth-friendly model of engagement, but this should not in any way be used as a tool to underestimate the outcomes of the engagement. The process has to be honest and transparent, with meaningful participation without hidden limitations and negation.

What tools and activities support engaged programming?

- **Ask youth open-ended questions.** Sometimes the strongest pedagogical tools are the simplest ones. Questions both open space and create space. Questions that participants can understand and relate to also invite them into the space. Ask youth questions only they will know how to answer. If questions include words or phrases that are not common, take some time to share the definition, introduce the idea, and then share the question.
- **Create opportunities for young people to participate and lead.** After the program/said activity, provide new areas for youth to plug into and get involved, even if it is not something your organization provides. Think about what needs to be done for the program to flourish and share these with the young people. Invite them to both take on roles that they are comfortable with and as you build a relationship, invite them to take on roles that are slightly uncomfortable. If they take these on, you also know they trust you—to support them, to let them struggle but not fall, to learn but not be demoralized.

How do we balance the systems with our values? Advocacy? Balance what stakeholder/donor wants? Strategic partnership and planning.

Integrating youth into places of power can be challenging. Our systems create legal barriers to participation. Governing boards may have age requirements written into laws, ordinances, or bylaws. The process of changing them may be arduous, costing more political

capital than adults are willing to spend. By advocating with youth from a values' perspective, and clearly articulating needed changes and steps on the way to get there, you can begin breaking down some of the resistance.

Just as many adaptations that allow people with disabilities access to the public realm also better serve the public at large (for example, curb cuts and automatic doors), adaptations that allow youth to participate more fully can also enable other people who are regularly excluded by power structures. Using plain language, avoiding jargon, flexibility in scheduling and respect for timelines, providing experienced mentors to new members, transparency, and offering background information in a variety of formats can make decision-making bodies both more accessible and more accountable.

For organizations and decision-making bodies interested in including youth in their decision-making purposes, many models already exist. Institutions don't need to do it in isolation and can follow best practices put together by systems and organizations that have been doing this work for years. (For example, see [YMCA publication](#) and other resources for [Youth on Boards here](#).)

The personal and communal values of young people can motivate civic participation and yield informed decisions that represent their interests. For inclusive programming, it is important to acknowledge the needs of young people from low-income backgrounds. They may need resources as well as accessibility to remove practical socio-economic barriers hindering their participation.

5. Checklist to see if you are minimizing barriers

As we have mentioned before, it is a fundamental principle that the programs we offer to young people are accessible, but how do we achieve this? Here is a checklist of questions you can ask yourself to see if you are reducing barriers to participation.

- Did you check to see if the time is when young people are not in school/sports/clubs? For youth who work, when do they work?
- Is your work virtual or in-person?
 - If it is virtual, do you provide support with Wi-Fi or hotspot connection or provide a device students can use to login?
 - If it is in-person, do young people need to rely on car rides? Public transportation?
- Will students need to dress a certain way?
- Can students eat and drink where you will be at? Will you provide food?
- Is your program primarily in one language?
- Do participants understand and speak the language in which you offer the program? This does not only refer to a language as such, but to the type of language used.
- Do any of your students need any assistive preference?

- Are there requirements to participate in the program? This should be enabled without major hurdles or conditions.

If you are looking for more inspiration, we invite you to read these cases studies about various programs in our workspaces that we have gathered in the following section.

6. Case studies

In order to share specific program ideas that we have implemented and that represent our best practices, we share 5 projects that we illustrate as case studies.

6.1 Youth-led Philanthropy

How can philanthropy be transformed in ways that direct resources to issues, problems, and solutions young people understand to be important and impactful? Youth-led philanthropy practices are one approach to answering this question. My involvement in these efforts started in 2000, with initial conversations with the director of YouthBank in Northern Ireland. Over the years I have completed an evaluation study for YouthBank Ireland and over the last 10 years worked as a learning partner for a project in Minnesota to spread this initiative across the state. Youth-led philanthropy joins community research to everyday lives of young people. What young people learn about their community, other young people in it and the issues and problems that are both present and invisible, is discussed and as a group they decide where they want to direct funding. Most require that requests for proposals include a strong youth voice and leadership component, as they want to fund youth-led projects as well as address particular issues. Drawing on the principle: Nothing about us without us, the groups seek to both understand youth issues and resource other young people to design and implement what they think will be ways to address those issues.

Program Description

Youth-led philanthropy has several common activities. This project starts as most organizing activities do with the formation of a group. Once a group is established, members are trained on topics and processes that support transparent and ethical grant making. Before these training finishes, the group designs a community research project and starts gathering data about youth issues and problems in their communities. As the data comes in, they discuss what they are learning and what this teaches them about what they might want to do with the funds they have to distribute. Themes for funding are agreed upon by the group and an RFP is announced. Promotion and publicity of their funding opportunity takes over much of the next phase. As application comes in, the group moves to reviewing each grant application, and eventually deciding who will receive their funding support. Often an award ceremony is held to honor the grantees and finally the funds are distributed. The work of the group is not yet over. They now move into evaluating the project and learning how their support impacted the issue they care about. Finally, they work to recruit new members and the process begins again.

The first and often the most important step is the recruitment of young people to participate in the group, often called a bank, but also goes by the names of youth advisory board, youth community fund, and youth leadership teams. This is critical, as the goal of the initial recruitment (although rarely accomplished) is to reach out and attract representatives of the youth population. When the sponsoring organization has deep trust across communities this can be done, otherwise, the group often starts with heavy representation within one or two identities and communities.

Once a group has been recruited, training occupies the first meetings and focuses on both context and process focus. Standard training topics include teamwork, community building, democratic decision-making, community research, grant making, and evaluation. Groups that have longevity focus their first meetings on building a strong team, with training directed towards both what skills and competencies create strong teams, and what strengths and contributions do particular team members have that they want to share with this group. The focus on strong community building does not fade, but continues to be a regular activity for each meeting and throughout the entire process. The methodology is participatory as the project itself aims to increase youth leadership and direct participation in decision making. Recommended is not training the group on every topic prior to awarding grants. Instead, a model of just in time training dominates, with young people learning about a process and then implementing it that week or that day. For example, the group is often trained on democratic decision making, with multiple ways of making decisions collectively presented and then asked to utilize one to make the decision about their research design. A major transition point is when the group finishes the community research and decides on a focus.

At this point, the group pivots towards implementing and managing a grant-making process. They develop a RFP, create rubrics to review anticipated applications, reach out to community organizations to publicize their RFP, hold workshops and information sessions with interested young people, and create systems to receive, review, and decide on grant funding. Some groups decide to host a mini-grant round, and use this process not only to distribute some funds but also to learn how to manage a grant-making process.

Once grants have been distributed, the group now moves to monitor and evaluate if their distribution has been successful in the ways that they hoped. Group members participate in evaluation training and then implement what they have learned to better understand the impact of the grants their group awarded. As this process continues, other group members are actively recruiting the next cohort of members and beginning to create the next cycle of grant giving. In some groups, members are also reaching out to community businesses and other organizations to request additional resources for their community bank or fund.

Desired Outcomes

The adults who initiate these groups often define success as young people learning about philanthropy process and the successful awarding of grants to other young people and that the funds were used appropriately. Young people involved focus on both what they have gained personally from being involved, which they often define as leadership, understanding their community, recognizing their own strengths and how they can contribute to addressing community issues and problems, and what their work contributed to the larger community. They want to know if the funds they distributed “made a difference.” Banks have distributed funds that allowed for park equipment, educated peers about sexual violence and consent, raised awareness about the impact of racism, funded drivers education for low income residence, provided personal hygiene resources for youth centers, supported youth arts and music events, and created events for youth leisure and connection.

Impact

The longer vision of this project is that communities and funders begin to allocate resources directly to young people and invite them to decide what should be done with community and philanthropic resources, with a hope that young people become active community members, pressing issues are

named and responded to, and greater social cohesion within communities is developed across boundaries and barricades.

6.2 Avenues to Civic Action

At CalCenter, we understand not everyone will be drawn to government, as many peoples and communities have been systemically disenfranchised, which is why we expand our understanding and approach to civic engagement as how people show up to connect, serve, and impact communities with various avenues. Our most recent program, Avenues to Civic Action (ATCA) is a program inspired by the context of 2020 in the US with a pivotal election and masses of civil unrest that echoed internationally. This program is meant to educate, inspire, empower, and mentor high school students across the Sacramento region, and eventually California, on how to take civic action in their daily lives with the understanding that this is how we utilize energy and resources in all areas of our life to do work and spark change. Youth gain historical and practical context, knowledge, resources, and critical thinking and organizing skills to make positive changes in the systems and institutions that structure their lives. It is not just important to give students new skills and information.

This program is created, managed, and executed by the Program Coordinator (PC), Drucella Miranda and is currently under re-design in partnership with Rebel Ventures Network.

Program Description

The structure of ATCA is moving into a yearlong program, with room to continue after the first year of commitment from youth to continue their Social Action Project. CalCenter follows the structure of the academic school year, beginning in August and ending in May to allow for participation of our target population. The first half of the semester focuses on giving students alternative information and education that is not always touched upon in school curriculum such as peripheral histories to that taught in classrooms. These educational sessions are given virtually due to the ensuing global pandemic and may be adapted for in-person sessions as allowed per safety guidelines. Sessions are two hours in length and focus on an overarching theme/topic. See table below to see the themes for each session. Zoom calls can vary regarding its content and structure. For example, one call may have a guest speaker lecture for an hour or having a panel of people speak to the participants. Generally, participants will participate in discussions that may be broken up into smaller breakout sessions. These smaller sessions will be led by Program Instructors (PIs) who are trusted adults who have applied for this position and are trained by the PC. These instructors will have a maximum of ten participants so there is room for in-depth discussion and space to relationship build.

The series of formal educational sessions is meant to expose students to information to help them understand what they do not know to create a foundation of curiosity to lead into the second part of ATCA, which is the Social Action Project (SAP). SAP will move into a structured mentorship for the beginning stages, which are research + exploration. Mentorship and guidance will be provided throughout the rest of the year in co-working spaces to allow youth to come together to co-create and imagine a way to take action to make a positive impact to an issue/problem they have identified by the end of the academic year in May. Potential project ideas are mobilizing youth to advocate at the city level for more funding for youth services; draft a policy change to implement at the school level; or start an educational campaign to combat apathy amongst their peers.

Students will have an opportunity to continue their participation in co-working spaces if they would like to continue working on their Social Action Projects in the longer term after the year-long

commitment. This allows them a safe space to continue exploring, researching, and fail so they can learn how to adapt and change to meet their goals. The co-working space designed to assist youth to begin their SAP with mentorship and eventually work more independently and even support their peers or new ATCA participants is co-created and designed by a local partner, Rebel Venture Network (RVN). RVN is a project run by a young adult in Sacramento, who was actively involved as a youth and identified an issue they cared about as a young person and created alternative education spaces and curriculum to support the endeavors of youth.

Desired Outcomes

CalCenter wants to provide and teach youth a skillset they can use at any age, anywhere so they can become agents of change in their own lives and respective communities through ATCA. We ultimately believe youth are not a problem, but a valuable resource that needs to be nurtured as we are the world we create. By providing these tools, we want youth to begin to lead not only youth, but also lead and influence adults in decision making processes at all levels. This outcome is measured through youth participation in a Social Action Project (SAP) supported by an adult Program Instructor.

The SAP is meant to help increase youth self-efficacy, with the intended medium-term impact being that youth will feel empowered as they practice using their new skillset through their ability finish a SAP or at least move through the various motions to get a project off the ground (see image 1). The completion of a SAP is the determining measurement for this medium-term impact. A second medium-impact we are working towards is creating a more cohesive sense of youth community and solidarity within the Sacramento Region and Central Valley as youth begin to organize and begin to shift a narrative where youth are seen as indispensable to our democracy. This is measured by changes through the comparison of questions that focus on relationships from the intake quiz taken at the beginning and end of programming.

Through our program providing a safe space to create an embodied practice of engagement at a level that youth identify for themselves, CalCenter's long-term goal is that youth in our program will be life-long participants in civic engagement as research shows adolescent civic engagement affects positive relationships to civic engagement and in positive outcomes in adult life. This will be measured over time through sending a yearly follow-up survey to ATCA alumni for 5-7 years. Participation is voluntary, which should be noted can affect collected data.

Stakeholder outcomes for corporate sponsors will be investing in future leaders and a general work force who is more apt at creative problem solving, systems thinking and accountable action to communities and environments.

Impact

“Children, after all, are not just adults-in-the-making. They are people whose current needs and rights and experiences must be taken seriously.” – Alfie Kohn

It is our vision that our world and systems will fundamentally include youth identities, needs, and voice in how we operate, make decisions, do work in our lives. As adults with more power, we must champion that young people have a right to take part in decisions that regard and impact their communities. This is vital if we are going to create systems that truly work for the people so we can be well and thrive.

Youth and adults need to take an active part in self-reflection, critical thinking, and imagining how we can be different in the world and do things differently if they are not serving people and causing harm or damage. As people with agency and power, we envision a world where we are all accountable to one another to dismantle systems that harm us and create ones that nurture us as people.

6.3 Girl Empowerment

A society, in which women can actively participate according to their interests and desires, is only possible if girls are considered as a socially relevant target group. The work with girls was developed in the seventies. Although many changes have been achieved, there is still a long way to go. Sustainable and emancipatory girls' work, must be inclusive and must consider structural disadvantages. Taking into account that girls need a safe space for exchange on issues such as sexism, gender violence and racism in everyday environments, but also spaces for empowerment and recreation, the girls' empowerment project was created. This project explicitly targeted socioeconomically disadvantaged girls in Frankfurt am Main and in rural areas of the Hochtaunuskreis region. The project had an intersectional approach and aimed to connect diverse social spheres with each other to address girls in diverse life situations.

The project was created and developed by the educational center basa e.V., Michelle Chávez was in charge of the project design, the application for funds and the coordination and execution of the project, which was carried out from April to November 2021 in three phases. The first phase of the project consisted of networking meetings with cooperation partners. The second phase of the project included a series of workshops during the summer 2021 and the third phase was a 5-day empowerment camp during the fall vacations 2021. Through our empowerment project, the girls had the opportunity to find a space of sisterhood to exchange and empower themselves. This was achieved through the application of participatory approaches, leading to a hands-on process of seminar and workshop development with the institutions, the girls and young women themselves. Thanks to the cooperation with cooperation partners and the interest of the girls in the project, this project will be carried out again in 2022 and is planned to be implemented in 2023.

Project Description

First phase: networking and coordination. The inclusion of girls' clubs in the design of the program was a central aspect to organize the project program so that the workshops conducted could correspond to the girl's needs and interests. We worked with institutions that are active in the field of girls' work to tailor the project precisely to the target group. To achieve this, we held coordination meetings with the staff of the institutions. And since these institutions are the ones that work directly with the girls, they were in charge of the call for participants for the project.

The second phase, which consisted of preparatory workshops and project days during the summer. The firsts workshops aimed to meet the girls who visit the cooperating institutions and to present the project. Afterwards, we had project days in our educational institution through which the girls learned the basics of street art and murals and thus reflected artistically on what it means to them to be a girl and how this can be expressed through art. In this way, we gave an impulse in the direction that street art can be empowering also in the sense of appropriating space and defending one's own rights. We ended the day with a joint collection of ideas about different workshops that were desired for the camp.

The third phase of the project was the camp, which took place at basa from 11 to 15.10.2021. During these days, different workshop formats (half-day/full-day) and joint plenary meetings were held. A group of girls volunteered to participate in documenting the camp via Instagram with photos. In addition, one group was able to get involved in planning the closing ceremony and implement their own ideas.

At the end of the camp, an evaluation was conducted, in which the girls evaluated the project positively and expressed the desire to participate in another camp or to attend similar events several times a year. A second evaluation was conducted in November with the project's staff.

Project goals:

- Strengthening individual and group identity.
- Creating a program entirely according to the girls' needs
- Creating a safe space for exchange
- Creating a network of institutions working with girls

Outcomes

Despite the obstacles of carrying out such a project during the pandemic, it was possible to work with 3 institutions and 33 girls (between the ages of 12 to 18) during the project. These girls came from different backgrounds but had a lot in common, both the motivation to share ideas and the daily challenges they face due to various forms of discrimination. Another goal of the project was also the networking and cooperation with institutions of girls work in Frankfurt, which was also achieved. A participatory program concept was implemented, which was based on the suggestions of the girls from the preparatory phase. Through the cooperation of external educators with different focuses, the participants were able to learn how to behave in dangerous situations to protect themselves. In addition, they were able to discuss topics such as stereotypes and sexism in a lively and engaging way through music, social media, and painting. Apart from the diverse range of activities from which the girls could choose, they additionally had plenty of leisure time in which to make new friends.

Impact

The positive feedback from the girls indicates that the camp achieved the main goal of the project, that girls were encouraged in what they are good at and were given the space to find out what their strengths are. An evaluation meeting was held with the cooperation partners, in which it was determined that the goals of the workshop were achieved through the content of the program. The girls, who visit the facilities of our cooperation partners, express that they would like to participate in such a project next year. The camp has motivated the older girls to put their leadership skills into practice and two of them will join the 2022 Empowerment Camp as part of the organizing team. After the positive experiences, both the participating girls and the cooperating institutions wish that this will be the first of further projects of this kind.

6.4 Youth Election Programming

Since 2017, Caryn Scheel has coordinated youth engagement for Minneapolis Elections & Voter Service. Currently, her work encompasses several progressively intensive strands of youth civic engagement, with a particular interest in elections and voting:

Student Election Judge Program. This is an award-winning high school poll worker program for the Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services. For each election I recruit and place 250-400 high school students to work in Minneapolis polls on election day.

Goals

- To Welcome voters to polling places that reflect their communities and the language skills needed to assist voters. Grow the next generation of election leadership
- Engage youth in elections and voting as a strategy to grow voters
- Help youth develop professional skills by working alongside multiple generations
- Provide an empowering introduction to city government and inform youth of additional opportunities to engage.

Election Ambassadors. This group of high school and college students are experienced student election judges who want opportunities to contribute to other election projects while learning more deeply about elections and city government. They serve as peer mentors to new student judges, help recruit peers to work with us as election judges, and provide leadership and assistance on a variety of election projects they choose. They meet monthly as an online cohort, with individual projects on variable timelines. In 2022, youth are building a framework for sustaining youth voter registration within Minneapolis Public Schools, and helping to design a workshop to train youth in citizenship skills and empowering their voices in local government.

Civic Scholars. These 12-week summer internships are designed to engage youth in paid election work in a variety of ways. Some work full-time in our Early Vote Center, assisting voters with registration and early voting in the 46 days leading up to the August primary. A full-time college-age intern completes a data project that they design and coordinates a group of high school age interns on a voter education project. High school interns work part-time on a group project that gets implemented in the fall.

To make these opportunities available, I partner with local nonprofit organizations, other City of Minneapolis departments, other elections offices, and local schools (principally social studies teachers or employment coordinators). While we have some formal partnerships, most are informal where we support each other and share space and resources to accomplish shared goals.

My program budget is approximately \$200,000 with the bulk of that going towards direct payments to youth. I am the sole staff member running this programming within Elections & Voter Services in a .75FTE position. I have a robust database of participants with detailed demographic data going back about a decade, and access to meeting space and technology as needed to run the program. I do not have to do any sort of fundraising for the work, but it's part of the overall Elections budget.

Outcomes

Most of our outcomes are straightforward to measure.

Improve how we run elections.

We look at demographics to make sure that the youth we serve reflect the community and that they represent the language skills needed in the polling places. We collect evaluation on the performance of duties in the polling place and invite youth to participate in evaluation of both the polling place

leadership performance and the student election judge program itself. We collect data on what youth see as the outcomes and use their contributions to improve how we work with youth.

The regular inclusion of youth as poll workers and providing opportunities for progressive elections leadership has proven successful in ensuring that we are able to replace polling place leadership as they retire or move away. Currently 15% of our leadership judges are under age 30, with the majority of them having first served in high school.

Increase turnout among young voters and youth civic engagement

Minnesota has long been a leader in voter turnout, and the student election judge program helps improve numbers among younger voters. Analysis of our election judge list compared to public voter records shows that election judges are more likely to register to vote, and more likely to vote than their age peers. For voters of color, serving as a student election judge erases the voting turnout difference between them and young white voters. They also report talking with their peers and family members about the importance of voting.

6.5 Model International Criminal Court (MICC)

MICC is a program of Kreisau-Initiative e.V., and it is a simulation of trials before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for students from all over the world. The program helps young people to understand the ICC as one of the world's most sophisticated mechanism for the protection of Human Rights and rules of warfare. The MICC is a program that aims to teach young people – high school and university students and or out of school individuals, the core principles applied in the protection of human rights. My roles include coordination and training, often interchangeable.

Description

Since 2005, the Kreisau-Initiative e.V. along with its Polish partner-organisation Fundacja Krzyowa dla Porozumienia Europejskiego (Foundation Krzyowa for Mutual Understanding in Europe) has been organizing the MICC with the goal to intensify its work in the field of Human Rights Education. The program has partnerships with various schools, universities, NGOs, foundations and youth centers. Its activities facilitated by teachers, lawyers, journalists and experts in human rights and historical pedagogies.

The program starts with open call for participation, and in most cases the recruitments of young people are done by partner schools and organizations although some individuals apply directly.

Participants are high schoolers (15 -20), University students and individuals out of school but with some level of education that can enable her/him interact socially in group setting, and have the capacity to understand and analyze the project materials. The working language is English since it is part of international projects funded by EU Youth programme. The young people we work with are self-dedicated, motivated, organized, open-minded and intelligent (emotionally with diverse frames of reference).

The participations are assigned in the different small role groups with corresponding tasks under the supervision of a trainer who responsible for technical support during the entire project. Team members organize themselves and work independently to achieve a collective goal, the result to which they later on present to the entire participants.

Outcomes

The program seeks to attain outcomes such as:

Demonstrated understanding of human rights with associated responsibilities. Cultivated team spirit among young people for participatory work to achieve common goals. Improved problem-solving skills among young people. Positive attitudes and respect for diverse opinions, boundaries and individuality exercised. Situations approached from a multidimensional perspective. High level of intercultural sensitivity exhibited during learning...(empowerment).

Impact

The MICC program envisions a society where there is value and respect for human rights for all. A society where people are empowered to take collective actions that result into protection of minority groups as opposed to bystander behavior.

In summary, the project is intended to mobilize young people together and provide a space where they are able to freely interact, learn and express themselves with minimal patronage from authoritative adult figures (parents, teachers, coordinators, etc).

7. Appendix

Youth Matters cluster & collect – Focus group results



