

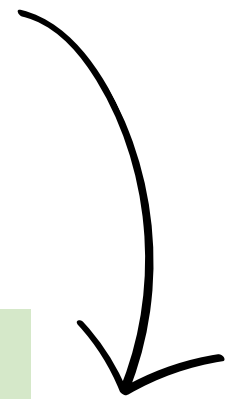


Fair Shake[®]
Environmental Legal Services

Youth Engagement Ordinances and Ideas

The goal of this worksheet is to help you see how other municipalities have increased youth engagement in local decision-making.

You can use these ideas to figure out what parts will work best in your town! However, it's important to keep in mind that most ideas will not be a perfect solution because each municipality is different in terms of size, resources, and abilities.

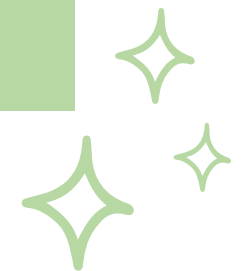
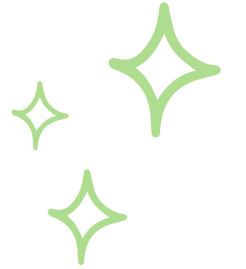


What is youth engagement?

- Youth engagement gets young people aware, involved, and engaged with their communities and local government.
- Effective youth participation includes opportunities for young people to shape and contribute to local policy, programs, and decision-making.
- Communities can increase youth participation by creating resources that support young people.

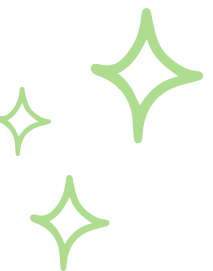
Why is youth engagement important?

- Young people are an untapped resource! This can be helpful for local governments that do not have a large capacity.
- Young people are enthusiastic and eager to make a change! They can give fresh perspectives and have new ideas.
- Increasing youth engagement can bring attention to issues that affect the community and young people.



Why is youth engagement important? (continued)

- Increasing youth engagement in decision-making has a more authentic impact. This allows young people to be involved with the decisions that they will be impacted by!
 - Also, programs co-developed with young people are more likely to be effective at involving more people and having a greater impact.
- Having young people and adults work together can increase productivity and innovation!
 - It can increase the commitment and energy level of the adults involved.
 - It can also create opportunities for growth and support for young people. Youth engagement supports positive youth development and can teach young people new skills and confidence! This is especially important as they will lead us in the future.



Overview of ways to increase youth engagement:

1. *Reduce barriers to civic engagement*


- a. Support youth in creating their own projects
- b. Lower the voting age for youth-related elections
- c. Grant students excused absences for attending civic events
- d. Offer internship or volunteer opportunities

2. *Allow youth to join city councils or commissions*

- a. Allow youth to join existing city councils
- b. Allow youth to join city advisory boards
- c. Start a youth council (municipality and county level)

3. *Increase outreach to youth*

- a. Host youth-specific town hall meetings
- b. Host youth summits or forums
- c. Host youth hackathons
- d. Increase youth-produced social media and media content



Click on the idea to
view an example!

Support youth in creating their own projects

[Click to learn more!](#)

Brownsville, Pennsylvania: provides assistance to the Students in Action Project where students create projects to improve their local community

PRACTICALITY

- Requires funding and resources to be allocated for youth-led projects
- Does not require additional planning as the projects are youth-led and created

EQUITABLE

- Reduces barriers to entry by offering funds, resources, and support
- Projects focus on local issues to improve the community

RESILIENCY

- Encourages youth-led initiatives and participation

AUTHENTICITY

- Collaboration with adults is encouraged, but this makes sure there are opportunities for youth to lead and not just only have adult-led projects!

Lower the age for youth-related elections

[Click to learn more!](#)

Newark, New Jersey: lowered the voting age for school board elections to 16

PRACTICALITY

- Municipalities can pass an ordinance to lower the voting age for certain elections
- This can be coupled with civic education being incorporated into their curriculum

EQUITABLE

- Allows youth to be represented in an election that has a direct impact on them, especially in diverse areas

RESILIENCY

- Empowers youth and enhances democracy

AUTHENTICITY

- Allow youth to get involved; it is unrealistic to exclude young people from the process if they will be impacted!

Grant students excused absences for attending civic events

New Jersey: passed the Involve Our Youth Act which allows 6th through 12th graders an annual excused absence for going to a civic event

PRACTICALITY

- Local and state governments can pass an ordinance or act to allow excused absences for attending civic events

EQUITABLE

- Is a bipartisan act that increases opportunities for youth to be civically engaged

RESILIENCY

- Increases youth participation

AUTHENTICITY

- Opens participation to a diverse range of people and involves youth who are representative of the larger community

[Click to learn more!](#)

Offer internship or volunteer opportunities

[Click to learn more!](#)

Chester County, Pennsylvania: offers internships and volunteer opportunities for students

PRACTICALITY

- Internships are unpaid but can be completed for academic credit instead
- Volunteer opportunities range for ages 12 and up with an adult accompaniment to high school and college students

EQUITABLE

- Students can intern/volunteer with several departments and gain experience with local issues ranging from positive neighborhood environment to neighborhood safety to public health

RESILIENCY

- Creates opportunities for youth to gain exposure to local government

AUTHENTICITY

- Provide training, support, or mentorship to give students the skills to get involved

Allow youth to join existing city councils

[Click to learn more!](#)

Sequim, Washington: has a resolution that allows two students to serve on the Sequim City Council

PRACTICALITY

- Two student liaisons are elected by the Sequim School District
- Each student liaison must attend every evening council meeting

EQUITABLE

- The students contribute advice and a youth perspective on local issues
- The students are the liaison between the Council and other student body associations and therefore are informed on youth-related issues

RESILIENCY

- Increases opportunities for youth to get involved by creating new roles
- Increases youth engagement by establishing a liaison with other student groups

AUTHENTICITY

- Build a positive relationship between the youth and adults

Allow youth to join city advisory boards

[Click to learn more!](#)

Farmington Hills, Michigan: the mayor assigns at least one member from the Mayor's Youth Council to various city commissions and advisory boards

PRACTICALITY

- The mayor assigns at least one member to different commissions
- These commissions include Voter Participation, the Cable Access Committee, the Historic District Commission, the Zoning Board, and the Planning Board

EQUITABLE

- No barriers to entry because the Mayor's Youth Council is open to any high schooler in Farmington Hills or Farmington

RESILIENCY

- Increases opportunities for youth to get involved by creating new roles

AUTHENTICITY

- Take inventory of your current programs and determine areas where it would be most helpful and feasible for youth to get involved

Start a youth council (municipality-level)

[Click to learn more!](#)

Beaver Falls, PA: has a separate Junior Council Program for students

PRACTICALITY

- Open to high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors
- Four students serve one-year terms with an option for a summer extension
- Must attend monthly City Council meetings and monthly Junior Council meetings

EQUITABLE

- Create and lead 1-2 projects per school year that target community-facing issues
- Must attend community and city-related events

RESILIENCY

- Provides opportunities for youth to shadow city officials and tour departments to gain exposure to local government

AUTHENTICITY

- Increasing youth engagement supports positive youth development

Start a youth council (county-level)

[Click to learn more!](#)

Bergen County, New Jersey: created the Bergen County Junior Commission on the Status of Women, which is a youth counterpart to the original Commission on the Status of Women

PRACTICALITY

- Students apply independently but require a letter of recommendation and a transcript from a school faculty member
- Each commissioner serves a one-year term and the commission meets monthly

EQUITABLE

- Must create and execute a community service project that is relevant to their peers

RESILIENCY

- Provides the opportunity for young women to get involved with women's rights and local issues

AUTHENTICITY

- Clearly define the purpose of youth involvement so you can create a clear plan on how young people can get involved and to what extent

Host youth-specific town hall meetings

[Click to learn more!](#)

Tempe, Arizona: has a Mayor's Youth Advisory Commission that hosts an annual Youth Town Hall

PRACTICALITY

- Advertise town hall meetings to schools and other channels/places that youth frequent (ex: libraries)
- Create youth-specific town halls for students to make it more approachable

EQUITABLE

- Encourage all youth to attend and enable them to discuss the issues they are passionate about

RESILIENCY

- Creates opportunities for youth involvement and community connection

AUTHENTICITY

- Young people are enthusiastic and can provide new perspectives

Host youth summits or forums

[Click to learn more!](#)

Grand Rapids, Michigan: holds an annual forum called KidSpeak that engages kindergarten through 12-graders with local government

PRACTICALITY

- Requires more resources and participants than a youth town hall
- Better fit for larger municipalities or a collaboration between multiple towns or organizations

EQUITABLE

- Allow for community leaders to hear what support the youth want

RESILIENCY

- Provide opportunities for young people to interact and collaborate in a positive and supportive environment

AUTHENTICITY

- Youth involvement varies with the capacity of staff to invest time and resources, so consider what you have access to and be realistic



Host youth hackathons

[Click to learn more!](#)

Los Angeles County, California: Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture hosts an annual datathon connecting community engagement and the arts

PRACTICALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires more resources and planning than town halls and summits• Can provide a winning incentive to increase participation• Currently no youth-only option but is a good example of local government implementing it; several non-profits offer youth-only hackathons
EQUITABLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages students to share ideas for civic issues
RESILIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides opportunities for youth to gain experience with technology and data
AUTHENTICITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing opportunities for youth engagement can help them develop new skills and confidence, preparing them to be tomorrow's leaders

Increase youth-produced social media and media content

Fulton County, Georgia: the Fulton County Youth Commission has its own Instagram account to advertise community engagement events and local issues

PRACTICALITY

- Have young people create newspaper, blog, or social media content
- New content can be posted to new or regular social media or news channels

EQUITABLE

- Minimal barriers to entry; young people can create content about any issue they are interested in
- Social media and news can be used to raise awareness and target specific groups

RESILIENCY

- Gives young people creative freedom and they can design their own projects

AUTHENTICITY

- Young people make up an untapped resource, which can benefit local governments that often do not have a large capacity

[Click to learn more!](#)

Resources

- Engaging Youth in Community Decision Making, Center for the Study of Social Policy: <https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/engaging-youth-in-community-decision-making.pdf>
- Youth participation in decision-making, Ministry of Youth Development: <https://www.myd.govt.nz/working-with-young-people/youth-participation-in-decision-making/>
- How city leaders can spur youth engagement on climate, Bloomberg Cities Network: https://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/news/how-city-leaders-can-spur-youth-engagement-climate?utm_source=spark-newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=spark
- Involving Youth in Positive Youth Development, youth.gov: <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/involving-youth-positive-youth-development>
- Youth in Decision-making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations, Office of Justice Programs: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/youth-decision-making-study-impacts-youth-adults-and-organizations>
- Youth Involvement in Decision-Making: What Difference Can It Make For Your Community? Michele Gagne: https://extension.unh.edu/sites/default/files/migrated_unmanaged_files/Resource002898_Rep4254.pdf
- Promoting Youth Participation, National League of Cities: <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/youth-participation-action-kit-apr07.pdf>
- Why Social Media Should Be a Part of Your Youth Engagement Plan, Youth Engagement Network: <https://www.etr.org/yen/news/why-social-media-should-be-a-part-of-your-youth-engagement-plan/>
- Civic Hackathons for Youth, National Civic League: <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/civic-hackathons-for-youth/>
- Establishing a Youth Advisory Council, generationOn: https://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/game_changers_yac_toolkit.pdf
- Youth Participation in Local Government, MRSC: <https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/engagement/volunteers/youth-participation>

