

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Authentic Youth Civic Engagement



NLC

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INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH,
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Authentic Youth Civic Engagement

Planning an opportunity for youth to engage in city government? How do you make sure it's authentic?

Authentic youth civic engagement provides young people meaningful opportunities to contribute their experiences, knowledge and solutions to city issues. To create and sustain authentic youth civic engagement, city leaders and staff can follow three core values:

- Treat youth as valuable partners in the work of local government;
- Prepare and support youth to take on meaningful roles in addressing important issues; and
- Respect and listen to youth.

City leaders may also want to proactively and deliberately avoid symbolic youth engagement that can feel good but risks ultimately alienating youth from civics and government.

When city leaders begin to build or expand youth civic engagement efforts, four initial steps support success:

- 1 **Scan and evaluate the authenticity of existing youth engagement efforts in the city.**
- 2 **Assess the city's readiness for authentic youth engagement opportunities. [NLC's Youth Engagement Perceptions Self-Assessment](#) can support this step.**
- 3 **Consider the different ways that cities create structures for youth voice. This and other resources from NLC provide examples and initial considerations for the most prevalent structures.**
- 4 **Plan for a structure that supports strong partnerships between youth and adults and provides youth with meaningful opportunities to provide input.**





Local Examples

Examples of various youth engagement structures from cities across the country demonstrate what youth can achieve when given the opportunity.

Youth Councils/Mayors Youth Advisory Boards

Youth councils are common in cities of diverse sizes across the country. NLC's [Introductory Brief on Starting a Youth Council](#) provides more information.

- **Advocacy:** The San Francisco Youth Council successfully advocated for a legislative change by the San Francisco City Council to provide free public transportation to youth of low and moderate income.
- **Outreach:** The Park City, Utah, Youth Council polled teens to help decide how to provide effective teen programming and presented these results to the City Council.
- **Programming:** The Rye, New York, Youth Council helps teens find work and gain professional experience by partnering with businesses to match them with teens looking for experience.
- **Youth-led Grants:** Milwaukee's Youth Council voted to allocate \$35,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds for youth homelessness based on their understanding of the community's needs.



Youth Summits

As a single or recurring event, youth summits maximize the number of youth who can participate in informing local elected officials. NLC's [Hosting a Youth Summit](#) resource will provide initial planning steps.

- **Santa Fe:** The mayor and other elected officials of Santa Fe, New Mexico listened to the concerns of young people at a Youth Summit.
- **Roanoke:** The City of Roanoke, Virginia, recently started hosting Youth Summits to give teens an opportunity to be heard by other residents in the community.





Participatory Budgeting

An advanced youth civic engagement structure provides youth authority to allocate a portion of the city's budget to youth-driven priorities. [Participatory Budgeting 101](#) can help a city get started and refers to other available resources.

- **Boston:** Boston's youth council facilitates a Youth Participatory Budget process to direct spending of \$1,000,0000 toward diverse projects, such as new fans in schools without central air conditioning and improved lighting at disused playgrounds.
- **Pittsburgh:** The Pittsburgh Youth Participatory Budget Committee, including students from each city district, decides how to spend a portion of the city budget.

Youth Participation in Local Elections

An emerging trend lowers the voting age in municipal elections to 16-17 years old. NLC's brief on [Lowering the Voting Age](#) provides an introduction to considerations and steps.

- **Takoma Park, Maryland:** In Takoma Park, Maryland, the first municipality to lower the voting age to 16 in the U.S, 44 percent of registered teens voted in the 2013 municipal election, compared to 10 percent overall turnout.
- **Greenbelt, Maryland:** The Greenbelt Youth Advisory Council led a successful advocacy campaign to lower the voting age to 16 for municipal elections.

For more information on authentic youth civic engagement, review NLC's Authentic Youth Civic Engagement Guide and other resources referenced in this document.

