

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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Definitions

Civic Education: The provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes.

Source: [Youth Power Civic Education](#)

Civic Engagement: Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

Source: *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*

Project Based Learning: A teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.

Source: [PBLWorks](#)

Civic Spaces: The political, legislative, social, and economic environment which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act individually and collectively to influence and shape new policies.

Source: [Civic Space Watch](#)

Inspiring Youth to Civic Action

Q How do you turn civic education into civic action?

A While many countries include a civic education curriculum in their educational system, research does not find a clear link between knowledge/skills learned in the classroom and an increase in youth engagement in civic practices in their community. Civic education curriculums often include civic knowledge (understanding the political system and citizen responsibilities), civic skills (analyzing and evaluating issues and participating in political processes), and civic disposition (citizen traits such as tolerance, critical thinking, conflict management); civic education may be a mandatory school course or an optional after-school or extracurricular program.¹ Civic education curriculums often do not include opportunities for youth to practice new skills in the real world, however.

The goal of these curriculums should be to lead to greater civic engagement in the community and the nation. Civic engagement can be defined as “working to make a difference in the civic life of one’s community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”² Civic engagement may include volunteering in the community, service-learning opportunities, political activism, and voting, among other activities.

Young people in particular have the potential to contribute significantly to their communities, which makes youth civic engagement particularly valuable. [OXFAM Australia’s Theory of Change Resource](#) recognizes that the current youth generation is “more connected and more educated than any previous generation... [with youth] challenging restrictive gender norms and utilizing technology to mobilize civil society in new ways.” To increase young people’s positive contribution to their society, organizations and government institutions need to consider how to build the civic and leadership skills among the youth population, as well as create an environment in which adults value youth input and encourage their involvement in decision-making.

1 Rietbergen-McCracken, J., [Civic Education](#)

2 Ehrlich, T., *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*

Resources

Civic Responsibility and Higher Education
by Thomas Ehrlich

[Civic Education](#)

[Youth Leadership Programmatic Review
Final Report](#)

[New and Innovative Forms of Youth
Participation in Decision-making
Processes](#)

Youth in Nicaragua turn organizing skills into improvements for their communities

Youth participating in the National Democratic Institute's Certificate in Leadership and Political Management (CLPM) program conducted a survey to identify key issues within the community. By analyzing the survey, the youth recognized that crime was increasing, so launched a campaign entitled "For a Safe Community," which lobbied the city council to take action.

For more information on the importance of youth engagement, see the *Implementation Tip* on [Engaging Youth Across the Program Cycle](#).

Below are some ideas on how to help youth put the skills they learn into practice in their communities. It is important to choose age-appropriate activities when incorporating these into your program –for more information, see the *Implementation Tip* on [Tailoring Activities for Youth](#).

Complement civic engagement curriculum with hands-on experience

Evidence suggests that programs that combine skills-building and practical civic engagement opportunities can have positive outcomes for young people. Therefore, it is important to add opportunities such as project-based learning activities for youth to practice the skills learned throughout the civic engagement curriculum, as well as to increase their excitement and motivation around using the skills. Project-based learning can include mini-projects that youth undertake in a classroom or an organization, or activities that happen in the community. Below are some activities that can complement in-classroom learning:

- *Create activities that mimic spaces for civic engagement in the community* so that young people can practice their new skills in a safe environment. Examples include role plays; initiating a student government through which youth learn about campaigning and the right to vote; having youth read newspaper articles about a controversial topic and then participate in a debate; holding mini-town halls where students or youth participants can provide their feedback or concerns to their school or organization; or creating complaint boxes that are reviewed by a joint student-teacher-parent committee on a monthly basis.
- *Organize activities in the community*. Examples include volunteer events such as helping clean a park or interning with an organization or government entity to gain a better understanding of how these institutions operate. Younger cohorts (ages 10 – 14) may participate in simple or one-time activities, like visiting the sick. Older cohorts (ages 15+) should have more substantive activities that allow them to design and lead the engagement activity and learn more about its background, such as a field trip to a government institution or a town hall to understand how government operates.
- *Pair each new skill or methodology they learn with an activity* that allows them to internalize the concepts and gauge the skill's or methodology's benefits and challenges. Examples include following an introduction to advocacy, having youth create campaigns or identify existing campaigns in the community and analyze their accuracy and effectiveness, or asking youth to design skits that motivate their peers to vote or be change agents.

- *Provide small grants and/or technical assistance to support youth-led projects.* Top leadership programs incorporate opportunities for youth to design and implement a small project focused on a topic that they are interested in and that would benefit the organization or community.³

Find existing spaces in the community where youth can participate

Before initiating a civic engagement program, it is important to identify what civic spaces already exist in the relevant community or country. Many local and/or national government institutions may already be utilizing different types of structures to solicit feedback and concerns from the communities they serve. When providing a civic engagement curriculum, it is important to incorporate national youth policies and introduce existing participation platforms. As part of this introduction, it is also important to assess why youth may not be actively engaging in these structures. The following are ways to identify gaps and build on existing structures:

- Utilize youth-led methodologies, such as [Community Youth Mapping](#) (CYM), to have youth identify the existing structures themselves.
- If a community holds a monthly town hall that takes place during the school day, the program can encourage youth to advocate for the meeting to be moved to a time that they could attend, or for the teachers to let youth miss school if they attend the town hall.

Connect youth with elders, parents, adults, and others

Many youth are eager to get involved in efforts to influence community decisions that affect the welfare of their families and society. However, sociocultural norms and institutional practices often prevent youth – and young women, in particular – from participating in public decision-making. Increasing the participation of youth in civic life requires breaking down these barriers and building youth-inclusive norms and practices. By integrating activities where youth and older generations work together, program designers ensure that communication – and hopefully with it, respect – will increase between the populations. As youth take more active roles in their community during and as a result of their civic engagement programs, older generations may recognize that youth are taking their responsibilities seriously and want to contribute to their communities. This in turn may lead older people to invite more youth to participate in their existing decision-making mechanisms and motivate them to try and understand young people's concerns.

³ USAID, [Youth Leadership Programmatic Review Final Report](#)

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net).

The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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Collaboration across generations can also increase the success and impact of programs by creating greater collective action and should be emphasized throughout a civic education curriculum. When youth or adults act in isolation, they are only motivating a small segment of the community. By working together, these groups can increase the pressure on government officials to make changes or have access to more resources that they can pool to address key issues in the community.

A school or organization can improve relations between different generations by:

- Linking youth with adult role models who provide ongoing support during the program, including mentoring, helping young people expand their networks, and sharing their technical expertise with youth.
- Encouraging these relationships to continue after the program ends.
- Implementing multi-stakeholder workshops in which youth, civil society, and government institutions work together to identify key issues, brainstorm solutions, and create action plans. This process works best when youth and other marginalized groups are trained beforehand on how to communicate effectively and majority groups are prepared to actively listen to others. For example, all generations may be frustrated by poor health clinics and can work together to lobby the government to improve their conditions.

