



FACTSHEET

Civics in Action: Learning that Challenges the World

Content developed from a YouthREX Webinar featuring Sarah Andes, National Director of Programming for Generation Citizen, Ian Bingeman, Program Coordinator for Youth Ottawa's DILA Youth Program, Lisa Barleben, Eastern ON Region Hub Manager, YouthREX, and YouthREX



During election cycles, many politicians actively pursue the youth vote because they know that the younger demographic (ages 18-24) typically has low voter turnout. While it is important to encourage young people to take part in the voting process, civic engagement extends far beyond the ballot box.

We exist in a time where information is easily accessible, but that doesn't necessarily mean we always make an effort to access and understand it all. Sometimes we need help. When it comes to civic engagement, we have to remember that democracy requires **active** participation, which in turn requires training. It is unreasonable to expect that young people know how to be "active citizens" - they have to be given time to learn, to try, and to acquire necessary skills to engage as citizens this way. One way to do this is through building a Civic Engagement Program for youth. Here are some tips from Sarah Andes, National Director of Programming for Generation Citizen and Ian Bingeman, Program Coordinator for Youth Ottawa's DILA Youth Program on how to do this effectively:

THE "DO" LIST FOR BUILDING A CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

- 1. Network:** Developing relationships with schools, volunteers, and community partners is a great way to ensure you deliver a quality program. Young people will be able to interact with a variety of people, and learn from their unique perspectives and experiences.
- 2. Hire well:** Focus a lot of attention on the people who will run your program. Select volunteers with care, train them extensively, and make sure to support them throughout the process.
- 3. Evaluate:** In order for a Civic Engagement Program to work, sound and timely evaluation is key and requires an investment of resources. Such programs can get repetitive, but program evaluation allows you to change course when necessary and to adapt your program as needed.
- 4. Youth showcase:** Plan to include platforms that will promote external recognition for youth. For example, you could include a "Civics Day" or a "Youth Action Showcase" where youth can share the work they've done.



THE "DO" LIST FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM WITH YOUTH

- 1. Be the change:** model the behaviour of a respectful, democratic citizen.
- 2. Attitude:** be caring, open-minded, and reserve judgment. Avoid saying "no" straight away, and instead be respectful of the fact that a youth has offered something.



3. **Channel passion and ideas:** youth see the world differently and often provide insightful ideas when given the opportunity.
4. **Build consensus rather than foster debate:** while a little debate can be healthy, it can also be the enemy of action. It can slow progress and prevent people from making change.
5. **Connect, connect, connect:** to others in the group, to schools, and to the community.
6. **Differentiate:** people learn in different ways, have different skills and histories. Allow multiple entry points for everyone to get involved.
7. **Provide training wheels:** for many youth, this will be their first time experiencing a program like this, so help by “scaffolding” (providing the support youth need to channel their ideas).
8. **Encourage youth to dream big,** but plan in concrete and manageable steps.
9. **“Perfect” is the enemy of “done”:** nothing you work on will ever be perfect. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t aim high, but you should also remember that learning from the process is also incredibly valuable.
10. **Don’t be afraid to fail:** success in civics takes a long time!