EQUAL VOICE
YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT
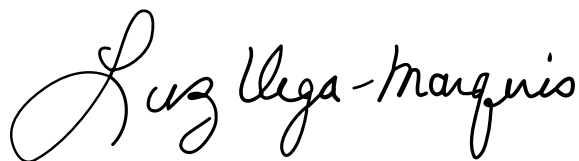# TOOLKIT

Dear Reader,

Young people have been at the forefront of human rights movements in the United States for the past 50 years, from the Civil Rights Movement, which began in the 1950s, to the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 70s, the gay rights movement, the environmental movement and, most recently, the movement for economic justice taking place in cities and towns across the US. With their hope, determination and resilience, young people play an essential role in advancing social change.

The Millennial Generation, the largest and most diverse in American history, faces a complex future. Some of our nation's most pressing issues—economic justice, immigration, education, environmental and criminal justice—directly affect members of this generation, yet they have few opportunities to voice their concerns and propose solutions. The Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project helps provide those opportunities.

Equal Voice is a movement of low-income families advocating on their own behalf for policy and systems change. Acknowledging the important role of young people in today's struggles for social justice and as tomorrow's leaders, the Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project aims to raise the voices of youth and integrate those voices into community change efforts nationwide.

This is a call to the next generation to step up and lend their energy, creativity and wisdom to help shape the society they will inherit.

At Marguerite Casey Foundation, we believe that youth and their families can change the world.
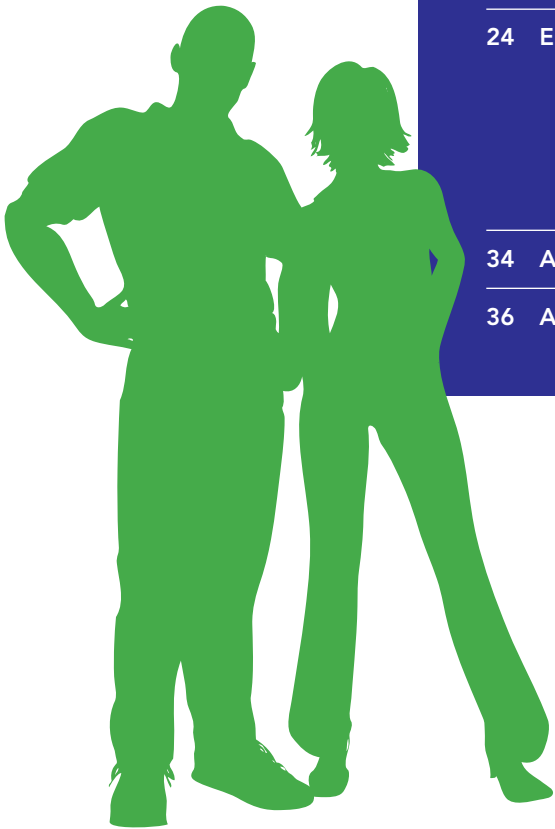
Luz Vega-Marquis
President & CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation

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What Is Equal Voice for America's Families?

The recent economic crisis has shaken our country, but for millions of America's families, the recession has meant more of the same but with fewer and harder choices: Will we have enough money to pay our rent *and* the heating bill? Do we give up evenings or weekends with our children to take a second or third job to provide for them, to put food on the table, make a trip to the doctor, or buy car insurance?

Yet, as millions of families across the nation struggle with these decisions and as their numbers swell each day, the truth is clear: The key to the strength, security and success of every community, and of America itself, is families, the basic building blocks of society. If families are in trouble, the country is in trouble.

With this in mind, Marguerite Casey Foundation launched the Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign in 2007, a yearlong campaign devoted to lifting up the voices of families nationwide and listening to their solutions to the challenges they face daily. As *Maria Full of Hope: An Equal Voice Story* shows, the process consisted of a series of town hall meetings; the development of a comprehensive family platform with solutions presented by, for and on behalf of low-income families across America; a tri-city convention; and the presentation of the family platform to senators and representatives in Washington, DC.

Town hall meetings

More than 15,000 families attended the 65 Equal Voice town hall meetings held across the country, answering questions like, "What is important to you and your family?" and "What policy changes would most help your family?" At each meeting, families conveyed not only a sense of urgency, but also their desire to be part of the solution—to be drivers of change. They were inspired, engaged and motivated. They defined "poverty" as *lack of access* to living-wage jobs, affordable housing, and quality health care and education.

?

DISCUSS

What issues are important to you and your family?

What policy changes would most help you and your family?

How would you define "poverty"?

The development of a national platform

Based on the feedback gathered at the town hall meetings, a family-led committee created a draft document that listed the issues and solutions that families across America had brought up. The document was presented at small convenings around the country where participants enhanced and improved the document to reflect their goals and desires. The final product was named the Equal Voice for America's Families Platform, the first document in which families put forward the issues they confronted on a daily basis and then proposed corresponding policy solutions.

A national convention

In September 2008, the final platform was presented to 15,000 families as part of a tri-city convention in Birmingham, Los Angeles and Chicago. Throughout the Equal Voice campaign, families had crossed historical lines of separation to work out proposals for social changes that would benefit *all* families. Groups that had been divided—by geography, religion, ethnicity, political beliefs and competition over the "leftover crumbs"—united for their common good. The momentum built at the convention demonstrated that bringing people together, uniting them around shared concerns, and empowering them to speak up about what they want can pave the way for social change.

A movement picks up where the campaign leaves off

Although the yearlong campaign to produce the national family platform—the "blueprint for change"—had ended, stories like Maria's (see p. 10) show that the Equal Voice movement picked up where the Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign left off. Since the campaign, Marguerite Casey Foundation has launched *Equal Voice*, an online newspaper, as well as a social media effort geared toward spotlighting the incredible stories of people from overlooked corners of the country: a young man living in a farmworker camp in Washington state, residents of an Arkansas mountain community fighting to save their post office, an Alabama grandmother caring for her two grandchildren in a tornado-damaged trailer. The Equal Voice movement believes it is important for people to speak up about the policies that directly affect them. It believes that all people in society deserve just that: *an equal voice*. Furthermore, it believes that when people unite in the name of the greater good, it can lead to shifts in public discourse, and positive change can and will happen.

**READ THE
NATIONAL PLATFORM**
at **www.caseygrants.org/hope**
and check out the
Equal Voice newspaper at
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org

GET CONNECTED
Follow Equal Voice updates
and join the conversation at
**www.facebook.com/
EqualVoiceNews** and
www.twitter.com/equalvoicenews

About the Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project

The Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project is a nationwide effort to build on the Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign. Using the documentary *Maria Full of Hope: An Equal Voice Story* as a springboard for dialogue, along with community events, discussion materials and leadership activities, the Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project provides young people (roughly ages 12–22) with a forum to experience democracy in action. Specifically, the project aims to meet the following objectives:

- Lift up young voices by providing a platform to express concerns, opinions and hopes around issues most relevant to them.

- Provide young leaders and youth-focused organizations with tools and resources that enable them to better engage and inspire young people.

- Inspire young people to join community organizations that are addressing systemic community challenges.

- Increase civic participation and voter registration among young people.

- Build coalitions among organizations devoted to empowering youth and/or sparking more youth involvement in their programs.

For more information and to get involved, visit **www.caseygrants.org/hope**

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help young people use *Maria Full of Hope* as a springboard to identify, understand and influence the issues that are most important to them. The following pages include facilitation guidelines, discussion questions, exercises for personal reflection and team building, background information on the major issues facing young people, case studies of youth organizing victories and a host of additional resources. Student leaders, teachers, service providers and community groups can use this toolkit to guide young people through a path of self-discovery, give them the tools to understand issues that most affect them, empower them with the confidence to address these challenges, and spark action and civic engagement.

This toolkit can be used to:

- Help young people explore their identities and how they fit into the larger social structure.
- Break the ice among peers and support them in building strong unified teams.
- Spark discussion around the unique needs and concerns faced by young people today.
- Support young people in finding solutions to the issues that most affect them.
- Inspire young people to get more involved in community change efforts, and give them an "equal voice" on par with that of their adult counterparts.

NOTE Across the country, young people are harnessing the frustrations and uncertainty surrounding their present and their future, and are discovering creative ways to address these issues. This toolkit is not meant to be definitive or all-inclusive, but is intended to point facilitators and young leaders toward a handful of activities that can pave the way for deeper learning, networking and action. Throughout this toolkit, there are references to additional resources and organizations that can provide greater context and background for those who want to delve deeper into the issues.

LOOK FOR THE STAR!
Some pages of this toolkit have been designed to be photocopied and shared with the group you're working with. We've noted those pages with a star.

For Facilitators

The discussions and activities mapped out in this toolkit may raise some personal issues, sensitivities and even potential conflict or disagreement. Because of the profoundly personal nature of this exploration, we highly recommend that discussions and activities are led by an experienced facilitator. The following section provides some broad guidelines that are tried and true "tent poles" of good facilitation.

Setting Guidelines

Before delving into intimate conversations, it is important to establish guidelines and create a "safe space" in which participants trust each other enough to share their experiences. A good way to do this is to conduct a group brainstorm of discussion guidelines before engaging in conversation. While the group brainstorms, you or a volunteer can jot down their guideline ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard. You may consider prompting participants with some commonly used dialogue guidelines:

1. **Step Up, Step Back:** If you speak a lot, step back so others can speak, and if you are quieter, feel empowered to share your experiences!

2. **Use the Whoa:** Ask questions, and don't be afraid to get more information or ask for clarification.

3. **Throw Glitter, Not Shade:** Be positive when others share their ideas.

4. **One Mic:** One person speaks at a time.

5. **Use "I statements":** Speak from your own experience as much as possible, and lead statements with "I think," "I feel" or "I believe."

NOTE TO FACILITATORS
Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers. Most of the questions in this guide are geared toward encouraging personal reflection and story-sharing.

Ensuring Participation

- **Lively facilitation** will keep participants engaged. Conveying your own passion, energy and commitment is the best way to ensure others feel it too.

- **Pace your presentation** so that it is not rushed, and give participants time to absorb and think about it so that they have time to ask questions before you move on.

- **Look at participants** when they speak.

- **Promote listening** by asking a participant who is speaking to speak up—especially if you notice others are distracted. Use prompts such as, "Did everyone hear that, can you repeat that to the speaker?" Make sure that other participants respond to each other's comments. For example, "What did you think about what he/she said?" or "Do you agree with what he/she said?"

- **Check to see if you understand** the meaning of a participant's statements by reflecting back to them a summary of the main point(s) that you think they were making. This will help clarify that you have understood, and also ensures that other participants understood as well.

- **Ask open-ended questions** (i.e., those that require more than a "yes" or "no" response) to get more in-depth responses.

What to Do After the Discussion

- **Conduct a group debrief.** You can use debrief discussion formats like asking everyone at the end of the discussion/activity to sum up their feelings about it in one word or sentence.

- **Do a self-evaluation.** Assess what you did well and what you think you could have done better. This is most useful when it is done as a debrief with staff or a senior trainer.

- **Look for an opportunity to get together again** so that you can incorporate feedback into your next effort and keep the momentum going.

Using *Maria Full of Hope* for Discussion
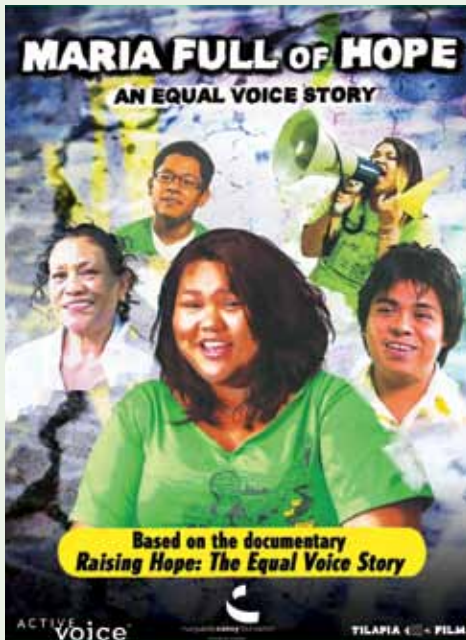
About the Film

Maria Full of Hope: An Equal Voice Story tells the story of one young woman as she reflects on her challenging past, joins a local community organization and becomes an inspiring leader battling the dropout crisis in Chicago. The story was adapted from Marguerite Casey Foundation's 2010 documentary *Raising Hope: The Equal Voice Story*, which chronicles the Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign to elevate the voices of low-income families. Designed to be a springboard for dialogue, *Maria Full of Hope* helps audiences of all ages consider the power of democracy in action, as they witness the collective efforts for economic and social justice being carried out by people across the country.

To request a DVD or watch the film online, visit **www.caseygrants.org/hope**.

In many ways, starting with someone else's story can create a safe space for dialogue where participants feel comfortable making connections to their own stories or circumstances. For this reason, *Maria Full of Hope* can serve as an effective tool to spark dialogue among young people experiencing many of the same issues and themes raised by Maria: disempowerment, identity struggle, personal history, community organizing and the true meaning of having an "equal voice."

The questions on the next two pages include conversation starters as well as discussion questions specific to each chapter of the film. While you won't necessarily need to discuss every question with your group, it might be a good idea to try to tackle at least one question from each section. If you are limited on time and/or prefer to stick with one particular section, you can scan through and decide what's best for your purposes:

- **Getting the Conversation Started:** for general discussions to help participants relate Maria's story to their own. We recommend beginning the discussion with at least one conversation starter.
- **"I Felt Like a Failure":** good for reflection on past histories, circumstances and social structures that lead to identity formation.
- **"Maybe the World Doesn't Suck So Much":** initiates conversation around motivation to act and the need for collective action.
- **"A Historic Event":** helps viewers consider the meaning of democracy and the power of having an "equal voice."
- **"Equal Voice Is Us":** can initiate discussion around the power of youth voices in social change efforts.

Getting the Conversation Started

What is your immediate response to what we just watched? What specific moments stood out to you? Why?

Sum up Maria's journey in your own words. What do you think it took for Maria to move from a place of disempowerment to one of empowerment?

Does Maria remind you of anyone you know? Do you know anyone who went through a similar journey?

"I Felt Like a Failure"

Maria talks about how in her high school, students of color were often singled out or "alienated" by faculty. Have you ever felt like this? How did you respond? Why do you think you responded in this way?

Alienate | *verb*
to make indifferent, unfriendly or hostile.

When Maria's brother passed away in the Philippines, she says she felt like her family "sacrificed him for the American Dream." Did your family have to make sacrifices to get where they are? If so, what are they? How do you think that has affected you personally?

"Maybe the World Doesn't Suck So Much"

Raul and Maria talk about the issues their community faces: immigration, healthcare, housing, jobs, education and youth rights. Which issues do you think are the most pressing in your community? Why?

Maria's mom has reservations about her daughter's activism, and expresses her fears saying, "I hope we're not in trouble." Why do you think she feels like this? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you had to take a big risk to stand up for what was right?

"A Historic Event"

The Equal Voice events gathered people from across the country to talk about common concerns in their communities. What are the benefits of having national meetings that bring together people from different places? What are the challenges in sustaining those connections? How would you address those challenges?

In the film, the Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign is depicted as a process that incorporates many different voices in building consensus. A facilitator then mentions that it is much harder for everyone to agree on something then for people to disagree. Why do you think this is? In your opinion, what is the value of building consensus?

Consensus | *noun*
general or widespread agreement.

"Equal Voice Is Us"

When Maria asks what is going to happen after the conference, Raul responds, "Equal Voice is us." What do you think he means by that? What does Equal Voice mean to you?

When Maria returns from the Equal Voice convention, she has a series of successes through her work at the Albany Park Neighborhood Council, including helping to pass the Illinois DREAM Act, changing unfair housing policies around foreclosures and raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for the organization's freshmen retreats. How do you think these successes relate to the larger movement to establish equal voices for American families?

Maria reflects that as a country, "We talk about democracy all the time, but sometimes we don't even know what it is." What does democracy mean to you? Can you name a situation you were involved in where you felt like democracy was being practiced?

Democracy | *noun*
a: government by the people; *especially*: rule of the majority.

b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.

Reflecting on her work at Albany Park Neighborhood Council, Maria says she "was meant to be a mentor." Is there anything you feel like you were "meant" to do?

Maria believes that younger people need to get involved in community work precisely because "people think we don't have an opinion because we're young." How do you think young people uniquely contribute to their communities?

Towards the end of the film, Maria says, "I feel like adults are either scared for us or scared of us, and not to say that it doesn't go both ways, because it does." What do you think she means by this? Do you feel like adults and young people have trouble understanding each other? Why or why not? What can young people and adults improve on to better understand each other?

In one of her final statements, Maria says, "Social change is not just about you, it's about healing your community…it's about us coming together and getting something done." Take a look around the space you're in right now. Most likely, not every person in your community is present. Why are you here?

High-Priority Issues for Young People

The Equal Voice for America's Families Platform reveals the major issues affecting low-income communities today: child care, education, criminal justice, employment/job training, healthcare, housing, immigration and safe communities. While young voices are needed in all of these realms, there are four key issues that young people nationwide have identified as priorities for change.

The following section provides some background on these four issues, along with suggested policy changes adapted from the Equal Voice for America's Families Platform:

Please note that these brief summaries and policy suggestions do not represent a comprehensive analysis, but rather provide quick background and facts meant to spark conversation and inspire deeper examination of complex structural issues. For those who are interested in delving deeper into these issues, understanding the historic and political ramifications, and connecting with organizations tackling these issues on a national level, we've included a list of helpful websites and resources at the end of each section.

Education

The goal of the public education system is to equip young people with the skills they need to succeed. Each level of education—from K-12, to vocational training, to college, to graduate school—makes a significant difference in a person's future wages. Access to, and affordability of, two- and four-year publicly financed colleges help youth tap into the opportunities for financial security. Yet a range of historic and social factors have led to a striking imbalance in the distribution of resources, with public schools in lower-income neighborhoods (often inhabited by people of color) tending to be dramatically worse than those in wealthier districts. Dilapidated school buildings, difficulty connecting with teachers, and lack of (or out-of-date) textbooks and computers are hampering young people's ability to learn and become productive, successful citizens. In fact, in some neighborhoods, many high school students are more likely to go to jail than to go to college.

> *"I did not feel connected to my school, I felt alienated. Why would anybody want to go to a school that they don't even care about?"*
> - Maria

Fast Facts[1]

- In 2005, school districts with the highest concentration of low-income students received $938 less per pupil than districts with the lowest concentration of low-income students. Many students suffer because of sub-par schooling, and many respond to inadequate schooling by leaving school.

- In 2009, African-American and Latino high school students had dropout rates of 9.3 and 17.6 percent respectively, as opposed to the 5.2 percent dropout rate of white students. Overall, nearly 7,000 students drop out everyday.

- As of 2011, only 32 percent of American students were proficient in math, and 31 percent in reading, leaving us in 23rd place for these subjects worldwide.

Policy Changes Families Need Now

Reduced Class Sizes: Teachers are better able to meet the needs of all students when classes are smaller.

Community Leadership in Schools: Parents, teachers and students must come together to work on the best education strategies for our young people. Local school districts must provide carefully monitored options for school autonomy to allow our communities to create innovative programs that meet students' needs.

Career Preparation: Helping students and their parents think about and plan for their futures early on will help ensure their success. They need to know by sixth grade the math, science and language classes required for different career paths. Increased counseling services would increase students' access to career opportunities, and internships and apprenticeships would provide our children with meaningful work experience.

Improved Sex Education: Comprehensive sex education would benefit all students by helping them understand their choices, health and safety.

Expanded Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Programs: Strong drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs would help students and their families address what might otherwise become a crippling challenge.

Ending Zero-Tolerance Policies: Zero-tolerance policies criminalize and demoralize young people. We need disciplinary models based on positive behavioral supports.

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[1] U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, available at http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/#.

Increased Access to Postsecondary Education: Everyone should have access to postsecondary education if they so desire it, but right now it remains accessible mainly to an affluent minority. As the economy weakens and budgets get slashed, education costs are being passed on to the students, putting college more and more out of reach. Young people around the country are urging strengthened support for postsecondary education and for more financial aid options for students from low- and moderate-income families.

Additional Resources

The following websites and organizations can provide more background on the state of public education in the US, including the historical and social contributing factors:

The Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ) is a national alliance of youth organizing and intergenerational groups working for educational justice. AEJ aims to bring grassroots groups together to bring about changes in federal education policy, build a national infrastructure for the education justice sector, and build the capacity of its organizations and youth leaders to sustain and grow the progressive movement over the long haul. **www.allianceforeducationaljustice.org**

American Diploma Project (ADP) Network includes 35 states that are dedicated to making sure that every high school graduate is prepared for college or careers. The network, including governors, state superintendents of education, business executives and college leaders, is working to bring value to the high school diploma by raising the rigor of high school standards, assessments, curriculum and aligning expectations with the demands of postsecondary education and careers. **www.achieve.org/adp-network**

The Center for Education Organizing (CEO) supports and amplifies local and national demands for educational justice in underserved communities. The CEO integrates the expertise of a university-based research center, years of on-the-ground experience supporting education organizing and a longstanding reputation as a seasoned convener of diverse education stakeholders. **www.annenberginstitute.org/project/center-education-organizing**

Justice Matters works to build and support a national racial justice movement working towards transformative education for students of color—and to develop and advocate for a racial justice policy agenda in local schools and on a national level. **www.justicematters.org**

The National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. **www.nces.ed.gov**

Stand for Children Leadership Center exists because children in communities across America lack the power to influence our democratic system to meet their fundamental needs. Its mission is to teach everyday people how to join together in an effective grassroots voice in order to win concrete, long-lasting improvements for children, at both state and local levels. **www.stand.org**

READ UP ON EDUCATION

School Zero Tolerance Kills Dreams, Hurts the Economy
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/school-zero-tolerance-policies-kill-dreams-and-hurt-the-economy/

Real Cost of Teacher Layoffs Is Our Future
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/real-cost-of-teacher-layoffs-is-our-future/

System Failure
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2010/system-failure/

Immigration

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people arrive in America, often fleeing political and economic strife, with hopes of providing their families with a better future. Our country has been, and continues to be, built by the labor of newcomers, and we've depended on their contributions for centuries. Despite this, recent legislation in states around the country has deeply infringed upon immigrants' civil and human rights, spreading a "culture of fear" in immigrant communities. For young, undocumented immigrants, their immigration status prevents them from accessing grants, scholarships, driver's licenses and job opportunities. As fear and uncertainty continue to spread in communities across the country, we are less capable of being the strong and prosperous nation we strive to be.

> "
> *"We waited 13 years for our visa… I want them to go to school, finish school—so, you know, we can—they can—have a better life."*
>
> - Ana Maria Laforteza, Maria's mom

Fast Facts

- As of 2009, immigrants comprised 12.5 percent of the US population. Contrary to popular belief, immigration is not currently on the rise. In general, the number of immigrants living in the United States remained relatively flat in 2007, 2008 and 2009.[2]

- In 2009, 43.7 percent of immigrants in the United States were naturalized citizens. The remaining 56.3 percent included legal permanent residents, unauthorized immigrants and legal residents on temporary visas, such as students and temporary workers.[3]

- Each year, the Diversity Visa lottery makes 50,000 visas available to immigrants applying for legal permanent residence in the US. In 2009, 12.1 million qualified individuals applied. That's 242 applicants per available visa.[4]

- Over their lifetimes, the average immigrant and her immediate descendants will contribute $80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in benefits.[5]

- 65,000 undocumented students graduate from US high schools each year, only to encounter significant barriers to higher education and continued development.[6]

Policy Changes Families Need Now

Provide In-State Tuition: Only 10 states allow undocumented immigrant children who have grown up in the United States and attended American schools to qualify for in-state tuition. Without this support, many qualified students can't earn degrees and become successful economic contributors.

Support Services for Civic Engagement: Increased resources for English language and civics education classes for immigrants, citizens with limited English proficiency, and those interested in naturalizing to become American citizens will create a more informed and engaged citizenry.

End Racial Profiling: Taking measures that ban racial profiling and emphasize the role of local law enforcement will do more to protect public safety than federal immigration laws that foster a culture of fear.

Strengthen Pathways to Citizenship: Making citizenship more attainable would help keep track of who is in the country, ensure that immigrants are protected by the same labor laws that protect citizens, and allow fuller contributions to our communities and the nation. The citizenship process should be streamlined and simplified, and the fees should be substantially reduced.

[2-4] Jeanne Batalova and Aaron Terrazas. Migration Policy Institute, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States" (December 2010), available at http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=818
[5] The Opportunity Agenda, "Why Immigration Matters to All Americans" (2010), available at http://opportunityagenda.org/files/field_file/2010WhyImmigrationMattersFactSheet.pdf
[6] Roberto Gonzalez, College Board Advocacy, "Young Lives on Hold: the College Dreams of Undocumented Students" (2009), available at http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/young-lives-on-hold-college-board.pdf

Reunite Families Separated by Immigration Laws: For immigrants integrating into American society, relying on networks of family members has always been an important way to "learn the ropes" of new culture and economies. Barriers created by the application process separate siblings, spouses and parents from their children for years.

Support Immigrant Children – The DREAM Act: Federal authorities should ensure that all children have access to schools. Children are brought to the United States, sometimes as infants, without documentation. As adults, they are unable to get jobs, attend college or otherwise contribute to our country, regardless of their talents. Legislation needs to be passed that allows undocumented young people to attend college as a way to earn legal status.

Additional Resources

The following organizations can provide more background and context on immigration in the US:

DreamActivist.org is a multicultural, migrant youth-led, social media hub for the movement to pass the DREAM Act and pursue the enactment of other forms of legislation that aim to mend the broken immigration system. **www.dreamactivist.org**

National Immigration Forum advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to our nation. In service to this mission, the Forum promotes responsible immigration policies that honor our Founding Fathers' ideals of America as a land of opportunity and also address today's economic and national security needs. **www.immigrationforum.org**

The National Immigration Law Center is dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of low-income immigrants and their family members. Over the past 30 years, NILC has earned a national reputation as a leading expert on immigration, public benefits and employment laws affecting immigrants and refugees. **www.nilc.org**

The National Immigrant Youth Alliance is an undocumented youth-led network of grassroots organizations, campus-based student groups and individuals committed to achieving equality for all immigrant youth, regardless of their legal status. **www.theniya.org**

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights works to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. Since its founding in 1986, the organization has drawn membership from diverse immigrant communities and actively builds alliances with social and economic justice partners around the country. **www.nnirr.org**

The Campaign to Reform Immigration for America is a united national effort that brings together individuals and grassroots organizations with the mission to build support for workable comprehensive immigration reform. **www.reformimmigrationforamerica.org**

READ UP ON IMMIGRATION

Illinois a Sign of Hope for National Dreamers
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/illinois-a-sign-of-hope-for-national-dreamers

Alabama Immigration Law: Policy or Politics?
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/alabama-immigration-law-policy-or-politics

Census Undercounts Cost Communities Millions
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/census-undercounts-cost-communities-millions

Inside the American Dream: A Poster Child for Promise Rejects It as Myth
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/inside-the-american-dream-a-poster-child-rejects-the-myth

Parent or Lawbreaker?
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2010/parent-or-lawbreaker

American Made
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2010/american-made

Juvenile & Criminal Justice

The United States has more people in prison than any other country in the world, with approximately 2.3 million incarcerated people as of 2011.[7] A 500 percent increase from 30 years ago, today's prison population is rapidly growing, with people of color and low-income communities filling a disproportionate number of prisons and jail cells. The same trends exist for juveniles as well; we imprison more of our young people than any other developed nation in the world, and a disproportionate number are minorities. Due to historical inequalities and a lack of access to quality legal services, many people from low-income communities are susceptible to unjust sentences, mandatory minimums for minor crimes and difficulty reentering the community after incarceration. Incarceration blocks access to public housing, cripples an individual's ability to get a job, takes away voting rights and breaks families apart. "Zero-tolerance" policies in schools automatically funnel youth into the school to prison pipeline, taking a significant toll on not only youth, but also our communities-at-large, as entry into the juvenile justice system often diminishes people's chances of becoming productive, contributing adults.

> "There's a lot of systematic things I believe target people of color and criminalizes them..."
> - Maria

Fast Facts

- As of 2011, more than 60 percent of the prison population consists of racial and ethnic minorities.[8]

- For African-American males in their twenties, one in every eight is in prison on any given day.[9]

- In 2008, close to 1.6 million delinquency cases were processed through the juvenile justice system. Over 200,000 youth were adjudicated (put through a court process) and detained.[10]

- African-Americans make up approximately 14 percent of the national population, but make up close to 40 percent of the youth population that comes into contact with the juvenile justice system.[11]

- Research shows that community-based alternatives such as rehabilitation and counseling have equal if not better results than detention, cost less (in some cases 30 times less) in tax dollars,[12] yet collectively, states are still spending approximately $7.1 million per day (or $5.7 billion per year) on juvenile detention.[13]

Policy Changes Families Need Now

Increased Prevention Programs: Once young people are in the system, it's hard to counteract the negative effects. Communities must come to understand the value of programs that give young people the structure and direction they need to be set on the right paths.

Rightsizing Sentencing: Often the punishment is out of proportion in length or harshness to the crime. Petty crimes should not result in jail time.

Reduced Disproportionate Minority Contact: Youth of color are overrepresented in the system, but many states are incorporating practices that are reducing these numbers. All states should acknowledge and address the disproportionate number of youth of color in detention.

Increased Medical and Mental Healthcare: Statistically, young people in the system have higher rates of learning disabilities and mental health issues, but there is little treatment available to them.

7-9   http://www.sentencingproject.org
10-11   OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book, available at http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/default.asp
12   Annie E. Casey Foundation, "No Place For Kids" (2011), available at http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/JuvenileJustice/JuvenileJusticeReport.aspx
13   Justice Policy Institute, "The Costs of Confinement: Why Good Juvenile Justice Policies Make Good Fiscal Sense" (2009) available at
        http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/09_05_REP_CostsofConfinement_JJ_PS.pdf

Community-based Alternatives: Research shows that juvenile detention is dangerous and ineffective. Instead, resources should be spent on community-based alternatives that seek to address challenges on the front-end. Many places are seeing both their rates of incarceration and recidivism drop because of effective community-based alternatives to detention.

End Zero-Tolerance Laws: Law enforcement should become involved in the lives of youth only if there is a serious threat to school safety.

Additional Resources

The following organizations provide additional background on the historic and political factors contributing to injustices in the juvenile justice system, as well as recommendations for reform:

Advancement Project – Stop the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track is an innovative "action tank" that advances universal opportunity and a just democracy for those left behind in America. It works with communities throughout the country to end the use of school policies that push young people out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems through its Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Project. **www.stopschoolstojails.org**

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under 18 in the adult criminal justice system. It works in partnership with state-based campaigns in a number of states. CFYJ serves as a clearinghouse of information on youth prosecuted as adults and makes its tools and resources available to those interested in learning and taking action on an issue that personally affects them. **www.campaignforyouthjustice.org**

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice's National Youth Committee (CJJ) is composed of youth State Advisory Group members from across the nation. CJJ supports the Youth Committee to ensure that youth perspectives are represented in all aspects and functions of CJJ's work, as well as CJJ's communications with state and federal policy makers. CJJ envisions a nation where fewer children are at risk of delinquency; and if they are at risk or involved with the justice system, they and their families receive every possible opportunity to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives. **www.juvjustice.org/youth_leadership.html#Youth_Committee**

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) challenges the systemic problem of "pushout" in our nation's schools and advocates for the human right of every child to a quality education and to be treated with dignity. The DSC unites parents, youth, educators and advocates in a campaign to promote local and national alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment and removal. **www.dignityinschools.org**

Justice for Families (J4) is a national support, advocacy and organizing initiative of families of court-involved and incarcerated youth that works to challenge the community disinvestment, zero-tolerance school policies and punitive laws that lead to the disparate lockup of youth of color. **www.justice4families.org**

READ UP ON JUVENILE & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Behind Bars: For African-American Girls Acting Out Is a Crime
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/behind-bars-for-african-american-girls-acting-out-is-a-crime

Incarceration: the Platinum Revolving Door
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2010/incarceration-the-platinum-revolving-door

States Cut Juvenile Budgets: Who Wins?
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/states-cut-juvenile-budgets-who-wins

ACTIVE**VOICE**®

Jobs & Opportunity

We are in an unprecedented time in history: since the 2008 stock market crash, many Americans have become increasingly disillusioned with the function of our economic system. As our nation attempts to pull itself out of a recession, young people have arguably borne the brunt of it: they often have less experience than their seniors in the workplace, are the last to get hired, and the first to get fired. However, there is enormous opportunity within this struggle—young people between 12 and 30 years old are the largest and most diverse generation in American history. Many of the challenges that Americans are facing are rooted in reliance on out-of-date systems, such as fossil fuel energies or public education, that doesn't reflect the diverse reality of students. Young people are at the helm of important societal transformations, using their energy and innovative thinking to rectify systems that are no longer relevant. From green job initiatives to innovations in social media, youth are forging new paths for themselves by taking the future into their own hands.

"
"You can't expect people to be like, 'Hey, what kind of world do you want?' You have to go out there and get it."
- Maria

Fast Facts

- In 2011, youth unemployment was at its highest level since World War II.[14]
- In 2011, 55 percent of Americans ages 16–29 didn't have jobs.[15]
- In 2010, the percentage of 25- to 30-year-olds living with their parents was 25 percent higher than at the beginning of the recession.[16]

Policy Changes Families Need Now

Support Small Business and Sustainable Solutions: Pass and fund policies that help provide education and training toward better jobs and create vibrant and sustainable communities.

Increase Outreach in Low-Income Communities: Urge local government to help low-income communities learn about and apply for job training and education programs.

Improve Local Hiring Laws: Ensure that public works projects hire local workers.

Create Local and State Minimum Wages that are equal to a living wage.

Create Green Jobs: Offset the costs of creating jobs in energy-efficiency and renewable-energy fields.

Generate Youth Employment Opportunities: Increase funding for summer youth job programs and for employment programs for in-school youth.

Improve Financial Aid: Financial aid programs can help working and unemployed people attend college programs that can lead to better paying jobs, but funding is limited and is under constant threat of being cut by Congress.

Offer Job Training Programs: Youth need to know about, and attend, quality education and training programs, either at community colleges or community-based organizations or through labor-union apprenticeships.

14-15 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
16   2010 Census

Additional Resources

The following websites and organizations provide additional background and context on employment and job opportunities in the US:

The Corps Network is the voice of the nation's 158 Service and Conservation Corps. Currently operating in 46 states and the District of Columbia, Corps annually enroll more than 33,000 young men and women in service every year. Corps annually mobilize approximately 265,000 community volunteers who, in conjunction with Corps members, generate 15.3 million hours of service every year. **www.nascc.org**

Green For All is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through a clean energy economy. They work in collaboration with the business, government, labor and grassroots communities to create and implement programs that increase quality jobs and opportunities in green industry—all while holding the most vulnerable people at the center of their agenda. **www.greenforall.org**

Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the US Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16–24 improve the quality of their lives through vocational and academic training. **www.jobcorps.gov**

The National Youth Employment Coalition envisions a nation in which every young person is assured the full range of educational, developmental, vocational, economic and social opportunities, supports and services s/he may need to become a productive and self-sufficient worker, taxpayer, parent and citizen. **www.nyec.org**

YouthBuild USA seeks to unleash the intelligence and positive energy of low-income youth to rebuild their communities and their lives. YouthBuild USA joins with others to help build a movement toward a more just society in which respect, love, responsibility and cooperation are the dominant unifying values and sufficient opportunities are available for all people, in all communities, to fulfill their own potential and contribute to the well-being of others. **www.youthbuild.org**

READ UP ON JOBS & OPPORTUNITY

Getting Sick Doesn't Pay
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/getting-sick-doesn't-pay

Shuttered Factories Leave Martinsville Families Struggling
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/photo-essays

Poverty. Just Say It.
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/poverty-just-say-it

Older Hispanics Unable to Recover from Recession
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2011/older-hispanic-men-unable-to-recover-from-recession

Promise Broken? Low Income Workers Find Road to Green Jobs Tough Going
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/2010/promise-broken-low-income-workers-find-road-to-green-jobs-tough-going

Young Organizers Making a Difference

When dealing with complex policy issues, it may be difficult to imagine that change can happen. As Maria shows us, there is real power when people come together and have an equal voice. The following examples show that through coalition-building, research, perseverance and elevating the voices of those who are usually silenced, real changes can happen.

Example 1: Undocumented Youth in Illinois Pass DREAM Legislation

The DREAM Act stands for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors. Introduced to Congress a decade ago, it was designed help give young undocumented students access to college. About 65,000 undocumented students graduate from US high schools each year, according to a study by UCLA.[17] Many of these graduates have dreamt of a college education, but up until recently scholarships were unattainable. Though national law is still an obstacle, youth groups around the country have been working to change the state barriers to college funding.

One group, the Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL), part of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, worked tirelessly to pass legislation that would support private donations to create scholarships for undocumented students. Undocumented students were at the forefront of the struggle, taking serious risks by advocating for their rights despite the dangers that their legal status may hold. Their courageous efforts gained the support of legislators, university presidents, religious leaders and even the mayor of Chicago. Youth in the IYJL helped draft the bill, spent a week lobbying in the state capital, attracted thousands to rallies, made countless phone calls and wrote thousands of letters and emails. All their hard work paid off: the bill was signed into law on August 1, 2011 and paved the way for other states to provide DREAMers a path to higher education.

Example 2: Young Researchers in California Advance Education Policy

Organizers like Maria are not the only young people working to improve their schools. In fact, education reform is one of the biggest issues that young people are organizing around today. Youth are the experts in their own educational experience, and they have done an excellent job communicating this to policymakers across the country.

One statewide victory took place in California. In 2007, policymakers introduced a proposed bill requiring high schools in California to notify students and parents about the coursework known as the "A through G requirements" that state universities require for admission. This law meant that all schools provide students, regardless of race or income, with a strong enough education to make college accessible. Opponents of this bill argued that there were many students who actually didn't want to go to college; therefore, putting them through more rigorous course requirements would in fact worsen the dropout problem in California.

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[17] UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, "Undocumented Students, Unfulfilled Dreams" (2007), available at
http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/reports/Undocumented-Students.pdf

Youth-run and intergenerational community organizations like Californians for Justice, InnerCity Struggle and Community Coalition took matters into their own hands, forming a regional and statewide coalition to conduct research among the very students that these laws would affect. They interviewed students in their communities, conducted in-depth studies and analyzed data from years of past research. Not only did these young researchers find stark inequalities in college access opportunities within the public school system, but they also learned that a majority of the students interviewed did in fact want to go to college. Furthermore, based on a five-year study in San Jose, Californians for Justice proved that imposing college preparatory standards on students actually increased graduation rates.

The young people in the coalition were able to present this research to local policymakers debating A-G as a graduation requirement, eventually leading to the passage of the A-G Resolution in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the largest school district in the state. This successful effort served as a catalyst for other communities to win similar victories in districts across the state, including Oakland, San Francisco and San Diego. By actually asking the people whose lives these policies affect, the coalition succeeded in bringing about a major policy shift that will benefit hundreds of thousands of young people in California.

Example 3: Young Advocates Close Down a Juvenile Detention Center in Louisiana

Louisiana has one of the highest rates of juvenile incarceration in the country, and the overwhelming majority of the young people locked away are low-income youth of color. Nearly two-thirds are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses, and many of the youth have mental health needs that are rarely addressed. When the state opened up its fifth juvenile detention center in 1994, community organizations began banding together to close it down.

Several years later in 1997, the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) was founded by a small group of lawyers and young advocates. They realized that to take down such an institution they would need to bring out the voices of the young people who have so often been ignored. These voices were integral to changing the conversation about juvenile justice in the state, as they revealed the unsanitary and abusive conditions in the facilities, and helped the public understand how the system was depriving young people of their childhood and education.

With these testimonials in hand, JJPL partnered with churches, the mental health community, and family and friends of the incarcerated and recently released young people. Through rallies, protests and legislative hearings over the course of several years, the campaign effectively convinced policymakers of the negative effects of incarcerating young people during their formative years. Ultimately, they succeeded in closing the newest detention center and also helped pave the way for a handful of policies geared toward supporting preventative community-based programs over incarceration.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION
Consider dividing up into three small groups and assigning a case study to each group to read together and present back to the full group. As a full group, discuss why you think these campaigns were particularly effective.

Empowerment Activities

Cultivating community leaders requires building a foundation of shared understanding and values. Only when you know yourself, learn to work productively as a group and have a shared vision for the future can you start taking the practical steps to lead the community towards positive change.

The following activities, developed and practiced by leading youth organizations around the country, are divided up into three color-coded sections, which move from focusing on understanding the self to understanding the greater needs of the community. It's not necessary to do all of them, but do spend some time to read through them and think about your group's needs, comfort level and objectives. Then, pick the ones that best fit your group. These activities should take place in a safe place of confidentiality and trust. For more activities, visit **www.caseygrants.org/hope**.

EMPOWERMENT ACTIVITIES

25   **Self-Discovery: Who Am I?**
    • **One-on-One Interviews**
    • **Where Do You Stand?**

27   **Building Cohesion: Understanding & Strengthening Our Community**
    • **Defining Individual Connections**
    • **Mapping Community**

29   **Creating a Blueprint: How Do We Move Forward?**
    • **Pyramid of Power**
    • **Committing to Change**

NOTE Times listed are estimated for medium sized groups, around 15–20 people.

ICEBREAKERS

If it's the beginning of a meeting and the participants don't know each other well, break the ice by having people introduce themselves and share something fun and light-hearted. (Examples: If you could have any superpower, what would it be? What would you spend money on if you won the lotto?)

Self-Discovery: Who Am I?

These activities are meant to help young people discover and express what makes them unique, through their personal stories and their strengths.

One-on-One Interviews   **25 minutes**

Objectives
• Break the ice at the beginning of a meeting.
• Bring out what group members have in common.
• Bring members closer together with a fun activity.

Supplies
Flipchart, markers

Directions
1. Introducing the group (2–4 minutes)
   Ask your group to split up into pairs and find three things they have in common with their partner. These commonalities should not be physical but things that pertain to work, school, family, favorite foods, etc.

2. Doubling partners (3–5 minutes)
   Have each pair join with another pair to create small groups of four, and again ask them to find commonalities. Remind people to be creative in their ideas.

3. Creating commonality for the entire group (10–15 minutes)
   Bring the whole group back together, and have each four-person cohort share its three common characteristics. You'll usually find that it's difficult at first for the small groups to think of common traits, but many people in the larger group will easily find things in common. (Record commonalities on a flipchart, chalkboard or dry erase board.)

(From: *Collective Leadership Works: Preparing Youth and Adults for Community Change*, a project of the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change)

Where Do You Stand?   30–45 minutes

Objectives
• Break the ice on some more controversial topics.
• Understand and demonstrate the diversity of different perspectives in the room.
• Find commonalities among different perspectives in the room.

Supplies
No supplies needed for this activity, just willing participants who keep an open mind!

Directions

1. Setting up the room (5 minutes)
   Designate one side of the room as "strongly agree," one side of the room as "strongly disagree" and the middle "neutral." Explain to the participants that you will be listing statements (examples below), and without talking they should find a place in the room along the spectrum of opinions that reflects where they stand on the issue. The statements should start off light-hearted and move into more controversial territory.

2. Acknowledging others' positions (2 minutes)
   Once group members have taken their place in the room, ask them to take a moment and notice who is standing where.

3. Discussion (5–10 minutes)
   Ask individual members: "Why did you choose to stand in the place where you are standing?" Encourage everyone to listen to the speaker without interrupting. After that individual has finished explaining their opinion, they can then ask another student why they chose to stand where they did. If the group is big, you may want to select only certain individuals to answer after each statement. If this is the case, ensure that different people are being asked each time.

   Examples of statements—feel free to create your own:

   • Vanilla ice cream is better than chocolate.
   • The Red Sox are better than the Yankees.
   • I am a morning person.
   • The voting age should be lowered to 16.
   • Most adults don't respect youth opinions.
   • Change is inevitable.
   • Alcoholism is a big problem among teenagers.
   • Students should wear uniforms to school.
   • Everyone should be provided with access to higher education regardless of immigration status.
   • The government has my interests at heart.
   • I feel secure in my future.
   • I feel like the US economy is getting better.
   • The government has no business engaging in wars abroad.
   • The effects of slavery are still present in our country.

4. Closing discussion (15–20 minutes)
   Begin by explaining that everyone has the right to their own opinions and that the discussion should be about general group trends, not an individual's position on an issue. Dialogue that is inclusive of multiple perspectives about each issue is healthy and encouraged, so long as everyone is respected in the process. Some questions to ask of the group:
   • Was there anything that was said that surprised you?
   • Was it ever difficult for you to stand your ground on certain statements?
   • Were you ever in the group that did not have a lot of people on an opinion stance?
   • Which statement do you think divided the group the most?
   • What statements (if any) were you surprised to see many if not all people agreed on?

Building Cohesion: Understanding & Strengthening Our Community

Defining Individual Connections   50 minutes

Objectives
• Identify participants' strengths.
• Connect strengths to the group's needs.

Supplies
Pen and paper for each person, tape

Directions

1. Setting the context (5 minutes)
Describe the purpose of the session: to identify what everyone in the group is good at and what they as individuals can offer. Tell the group, "Sometimes it's hard for us to name our own skills and potential contributions. Others can help us do that." Give an example: "If someone's a good artist, how could that skill be used in our team?" Push the group to elicit at least five examples (e.g., making publicity posters, drawing invitations to a meeting, decorating trash cans for a service project, designing a t-shirt). Another example, "How about someone who has great skills in basketball—how could those skills be helpful for our team?" Some answers might be: because he/she could help us understand how teams work effectively and help us work together, he/she could ask the coach to let us use facilities for a meeting, etc.

2. Brainstorming (10 minutes)
Ask the group to write down skills that they are good at. This can mean different things for different people, so you can ask them, "What is an activity that makes you feel really happy or good?" or "What is an activity that you can spend a long time doing without even realizing it?"

3. Sharing (25 minutes)
Next, invite each person to stand before the group and state his or her name and gifts. Ask the group, "How could _____'s skills be useful?" Ask for different examples to help people realize that the same skills can be useful in a variety of ways. Do this for each participant. Attach every participant's written answers to the wall. If you notice someone feeling shy or having trouble sharing with the group, encourage others to affirm them, perhaps by saying, "Hi _____, we're glad to have you as part of our team."

4. Reflecting (10 minutes)
Some follow-up questions to the exercise:
• What are some words you would use to describe your experience on figuring out what your skills were?
• How do you feel about speaking in front of the room about your skills? Show of hands on how many people are uncomfortable with public speaking?
• How is being able to relate to people, issues, topics, etc. an important leadership skill?
• What skills did many people share? What skills might be useful to have?

    Examples of skills:

- Sports/athletics	- Being a team player	- Liking to work with others
- Positive example for siblings, other young people	- Improvisation/freestyling	- Having a positive attitude
- Painting/drawing/ artistic ability	- Leadership abilities	- Being funny
	- Speaking other languages	

(From: *Collective Leadership Works: Preparing Youth and Adults for Community Change*)

Mapping Community   45–60 minutes

Objectives
• Open up a conversation about the shared space between different groups of people. (Spaces can be physical, like if people are from the same neighborhood. They can also be political or social, for example, if people are not from the same place, but share an experience or culture.)
• Examine different visions of our "common ground," or shared community.
• Examine the way we perceive power in the community—who is visible and who is less visible.

Supplies
Easel paper, tape, markers, crayons, or other art supplies

Directions
1. Explain to participants that this activity will lead us to think about the communities that we belong to.
2. Divide participants into small groups of four to five people.
3. Give each small group a large piece of easel paper, markers or other art supplies. Each group will be responsible for drawing a mural of their physical, political or social community. You may want to post these questions on a flipchart or dry erase board:
   • Who are the people in my community?
   • What do people do when they are in my community?
   • What does my community look like?
4. Small groups will complete drawings of their community. (20–25 minutes)
5. Reconvene the group, and ask each small group to present their drawing and to briefly explain who is in the drawing. Applaud the efforts of each group, and place all of these diagrams on the wall, next to each other. (3–4 minutes per group)
6. Discuss with the large group: (10–15 minutes)
   • What were some of the similarities in all of the drawings?
   • What are some of the differences between the drawings?
   • Who are the people that are visible in all of these drawings? Are there any people that are not visible in these drawings that we should add? Why do you think they were not visible?
7. You may want to review these teaching points:
   • These are all visions of our shared community, our "common ground."
   • We all have different visions of our community, but there are also many similarities in what we see.

TIP This activity works well in situations where participants can visualize a shared physical or geographic space where they interact, such as a common work place, a major street where activity takes place, or a large-scale version of their city. If a group chooses a political or social community, like "students," you may ask them to ground their map in a physical space like a college campus.

(From: *BRIDGE,* National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights)

Creating a Blueprint: How Do We Move Forward?

Pyramid of Power   **60 minutes**

Objectives
- Map out systems of power as a strategy for organizing.
- Help participants understand power dynamics around specific social issues.
- Prompt youth to understand their own power within complex social structures.

NOTE The following example is designed for examination of the education system, but can be adapted for virtually any social issue.

Supplies
Whiteboard/blackboard, flipchart, markers or chalk

Directions
1. Visualizing systemic power (20 minutes)
Draw a large triangle and, with the group, begin to fill it in with the levels of power in your schools. Start with who has the least power at the bottom and who has the most power at the top. Use guiding questions below to help with this process. See sample diagram on next page.
- Who has the least power in the educational system? Is this the same group that the system exists for?
- Who calls the shots in the classroom?
- Who makes sure the teachers do their work?
- Who makes sure the principal gets paid?
- Who is over the school board?
- Who is over this person?

2. Identifying community power (40 minutes)
Now draw another triangle below the first so that the figure resembles a diamond. Lead the group in a discussion to fill in the new triangle with groups that build student power from the bottom up. Use guiding questions below to help with the process. See sample diagram on next page.
- What does power from below look like?
- What can students do to change the balance of power? How can they get organized and create their own power?
- Who do students need to organize? Other students? Parents?
- Why is it so important to have a base of supporters? Who could be a supporter? (e.g., teachers, parents, other groups?)
- What is the potential power of the student body?
- If we can organize the base of the pyramid, what happens to those standing on our shoulders?

SAMPLE PYRAMID OF POWER

1. Draw the upright triangle and then start at the bottom of the triangle and ask the first set of questions on the previous page. Then place the names in the appropriate position in the triangle.

STATE SUPERINTENDENT

LOCAL SUPERINTENDENT

BOARD OF EDUCATION

PRINCIPAL/TEACHERS

STUDENTS/PARENTS

STUDENT BODY

2. Next draw an upside-down triangle and fill it in as you see here. Then ask the second set of questions.

SUPPORTERS OF THE CLUB

CAMPUS CLUB

YOC

(From: Youth Organizing Communities [YOC] Campus Organizing Workshop curriculum, InnerCity Struggle)

Committing to Change   **Several different 60-minute sessions**

If you want to see changes really take root in your community, it requires careful planning and the investment of everyone involved. Here is a more in-depth set of steps toward thinking about issues, recruiting a group of volunteers, finding the stakeholders to influence and taking steps toward change.

Objectives
• Help groups identify common goals for change.
• Move ideas to action through the development of a concrete action plan.

Supplies
Whiteboard/blackboard, flipchart, markers, sticker dots

Directions

1. Setting goals (30 minutes)

Use this toolkit or past conversations to help your group identify a goal statement that captures what they want to achieve. Examples:

> • Reduce dropout rates.
> • Improve access to college counseling in high schools.
> • Educate young people on how immigration laws affect families.

If there are multiple ideas presented, facilitate a conversation to narrow the goal:

> • Which of these goals is most doable in the time frame we have and with the number of people we have?
> • Which of these ideas would you most like to work on?

These questions will help tease out the complexity of the issues, as well as what the group members feel most passionate about. Once you narrow down the goal, draw a fishbone diagram, writing the goal at its "head":

FISHBONE FIG. 1

REDUCE DROPOUT RATES
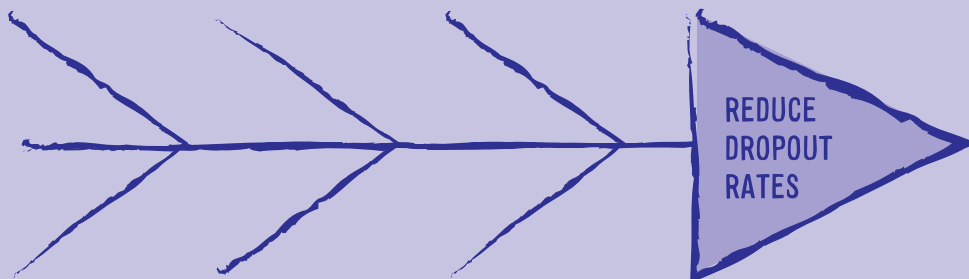
2. Identifying and prioritizing influencing factors (30 minutes)
Present the goal statement to the group and have people describe what the statement means to them.
- What would success look like?
- What would change?

Ask members to divide into pairs and share their answers to these questions with each other. Reconvene in the full group and ask members to brainstorm all of the "influencing factors" that might make a difference in achieving the goal, including policies, practices, attitudes, access to services, etc. As the group lists influencing factors, list as many ideas as possible on a flipchart or whiteboard, make sure to hear everyone out, and compile a thorough list. Then ask them which influencing factors they could best target, considering the following questions:
- Regarding these factors, what is doable in the timeframe we have?
- Which of these ideas would you most like to work on?
- Who do we need to work with to make something happen (e.g., school administration)?
- Who else affects the situation (e.g., public servants, parent groups, service providers)?

Give each person three sticker dots or colored pens and have them put dots on the flip chart next to the top three influencing factors they believe the group should take on. Participants should place only one dot per factor and need to use all three of their dots.

Once you narrow down the factors, help the group identify actions geared toward addressing those influencing factors:
- What are the steps we need to take in order to reach our goal?
- How do we know that we are moving on the right directions with our steps?

Once your group identifies these steps, add one to each "bone" of the fishbone diagram:
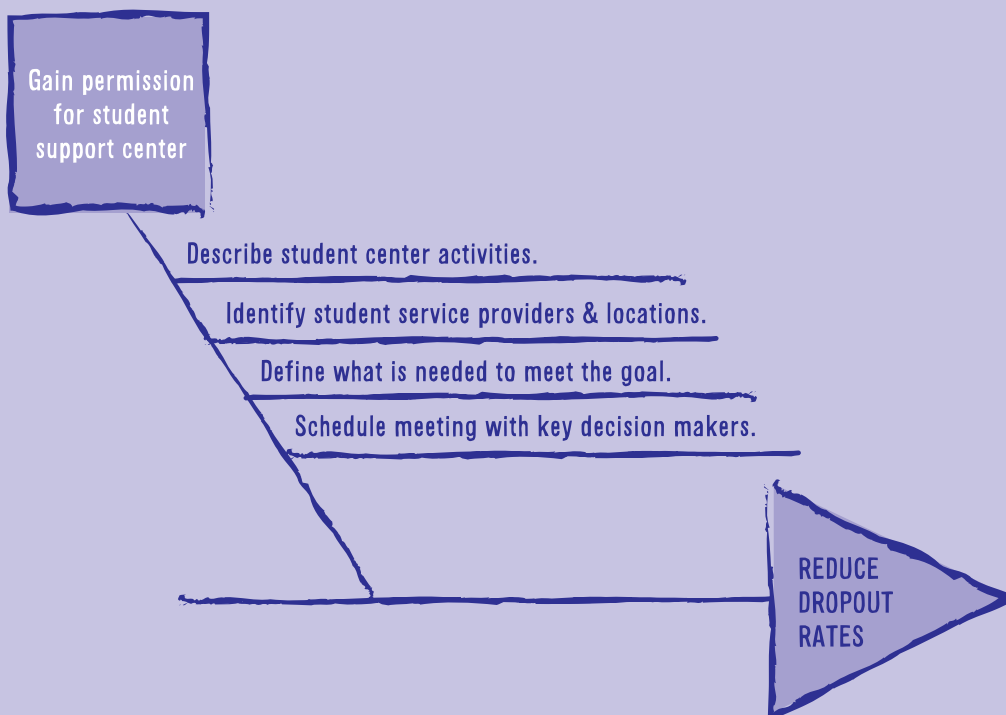
FISHBONE FIG. 2
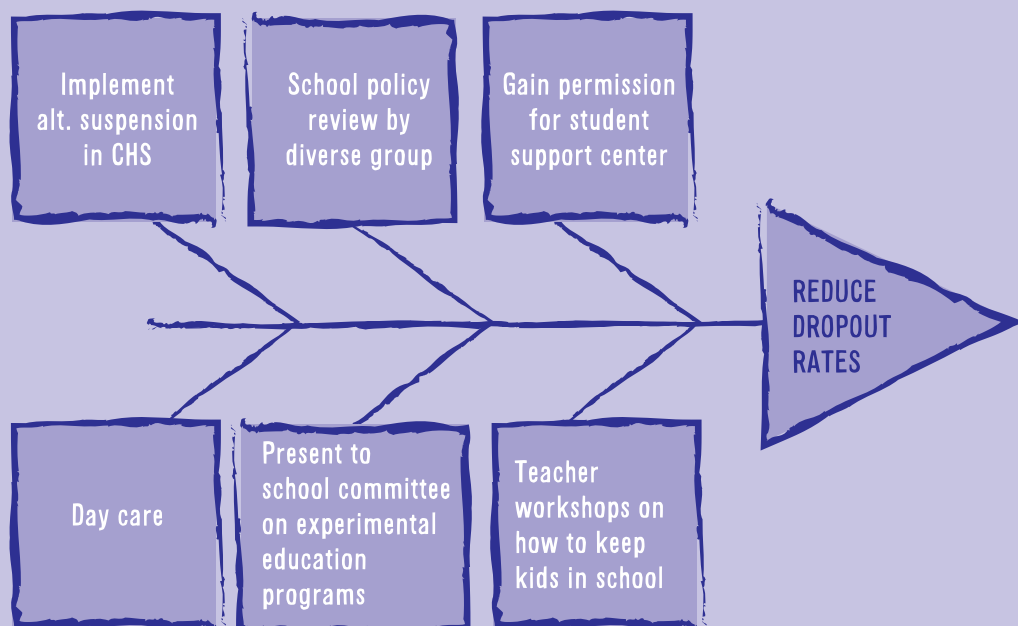
3. Making an action plan (30–60 minutes)

When your group has determined which steps to take to achieve its goal, ask people to separate into smaller groups based on which step they really want to work on. If there's a step that no one wants to take on, reconsider whether you want to continue pursuing it.

Then, ask each group to answer the following questions for their step to determine the tasks they need to accomplish to fulfill that "step":

- What would this look like in real life?
- What do you need to make it happen (e.g., space, money, time, etc.)?
  Do you know anyone who can offer you what you need?
- Who do you need to engage to make it happen (e.g., decision makers, friends, parents, etc.)?
- How will you deliver your message (e.g., meeting with key decision makers, etc.)?

As they determine the tasks, ask them to fill in their diagram as such:

Gain permission for student support center

Describe student center activities.

Identify student service providers & locations.

Define what is needed to meet the goal.

Schedule meeting with key decision makers.

REDUCE DROPOUT RATES

When the small groups have agreed on the tasks that they need to do in order to finish that step, ask for volunteers who can take on each task. Ask them to think about what they'll do to complete the task, and to come up with a timeline. Give people a few minutes to consider these requests and then ask for their answers. Set aside a time for people to check in with one another and collaborate.

(From: *Collective Leadership Works: Preparing Youth and Adults for Community Change*)

Additional Resources

Organizations Dedicated to Empowering Young People

Campus Progress is a national organization that works with and for young people to promote progressive solutions to key political and social challenges. Through programs in activism, journalism and events, Campus Progress engages a diverse group of young people nationwide, inspires them to embrace progressive values, provides them with essential trainings and helps them to make their voices heard—and to push policy outcomes in a strongly progressive direction. **www.campusprogress.org**

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing is a collection of national, regional and local grantmakers and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social transformation. **www.fcyo.org**

Hip Hop Caucus organizes young people to be active in elections, policymaking and service projects. They mobilize, educate and engage young people, ages 14–40, on the social issues that directly impact their lives and communities. **www.hiphopcaucus.org**

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development unleashes the potential of youth, adults, organizations and communities to engage together in creating a just and equitable society. **www.theinnovationcenter.org**

The League of Young Voters Education Fund finds dynamic young people and trains and empowers them with on-the-ground leadership skills that allow them to become civically engaged young folk who are excited about voter engagement. **www.youngvoter.org**

Rock the Vote's mission is to engage and build political power for young people in our country. Founded 20 years ago at the intersection of popular culture and politics, Rock the Vote is growing its team and its campaigns in 2011 to support the tidal wave of young people who want to get involved in elections and seize the power of the youth vote to create political and social change. **www.rockthevote.org**

SparkAction is an online journalism and advocacy center by and for the child and youth field. It gathers, synthesizes and promotes the best information from organizations and leaders across the country on a range of child and youth issues across the development spectrum. **www.sparkaction.org**

The Young Invincibles (YI) is a national organization, representing the interests of 18–34-year-olds and making sure that their perspective is heard wherever decisions about our collective future are being made. YI does this through cutting-edge policy research and analysis, sharing the stories of young Americans, campaigns designed to educate, inform and mobilize our generation, and advocacy intended to change the status quo. **www.younginvincibles.org**

Young People For (YP4) is a long-term leadership development initiative that identifies, engages and empowers the newest generation of progressive leaders. YP4 focuses on identifying young people who are campus and community leaders today, engaging them in the broader progressive movement and empowering them with the knowledge, strategies and skills they can put to work to promote positive, sustainable change in their communities. **www.youngpeoplefor.org**

Additional Resources

More about Equal Voice

Equal Voice for America's Families Platform
www.caseygrants.org/documents/equalvoice/national_platform_final_print_web3.pdf

Equal Voice Newspaper
www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org

Raising Hope: The Equal Voice Story
www.raisinghopethemovie.com

Equal Voice Youth Empowerment Project
www.caseygrants.org/hope

Acknowledgments

Active Voice uses film, television and multimedia to spark social change from grassroots to grass tops. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with media makers, funders, advocates and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute high profile, outcome-oriented events, repurpose digital content for web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of story-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare and sustainability. **www.activevoice.net**

Marguerite Casey Foundation exists to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities, with the goal of building a nationwide movement to bring about just and equitable policymaking on the local, state and national levels, policymaking in which the families have an equal voice. Equal Voice, the foundation's framework for movement building, is rooted in the strategies of activism, advocacy and education, and is guided by the families themselves. **www.caseygrants.org**