

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Connecting Youth and Strengthening Communities: The Data Behind Civic Engagement and Economic Opportunity

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Civic Engagement, Economic Opportunity, Disconnected Youth, Opportunity Index, Volunteering, Social Mobility

POPULATION GROUP

Youth living in poverty, Racialized Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership; Education, Training & Apprenticeships; Employment and Entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

SOURCE

Community-based

“Civic engagement is not just a feel-good element of community life or a benign expression of citizenship. New data and research explored in this paper indicate it may also be an effective way to build social capital and valuable skills that can facilitate upward mobility for young [people], better prepare workers for jobs, and strengthen the economic resilience of states”

1. What is the research about?

This research studied the relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunity for youth in the United States. In particular the research examined if volunteerism contributes to upward economic and social mobility for low-income disconnected youth.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in the United States. It is estimated that 40% of the total number of disconnected youth live in the 25 largest metros of the US. Hence data was gathered from the 25 largest metros that included Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburg, Portland, Riverside, St. Louis, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Tampa, Washington, D.C.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about low-income disconnected youth. For this study, youth between the ages 16-24 were considered. These were youth who were neither studying nor working.

4. How was the research done?

This study began with an extensive literature review. The researchers then used both survey and interview data to study the correlation between civic engagement and economic opportunity from the perspective of the ‘Opportunity Index’. The ‘Opportunity Index’ is a national tool to holistically measure ‘Opportunity’ across three dimensions: economy, education, and community.

The researchers examined secondary data from a national population survey administered in the United States. The sample consists of 3,038 youth (16-24) living in the 25 most populous metro areas in the United States. The researchers employed a multi-level model structure and controlled the data for contextual variables and regression analysis. The analysis focused on the individual impact as well as community impact. Researchers also held more than two-dozen in-depth interviews with experts on the issue.

5. What are the key findings?

The key findings can be summarized under two categories:

The Individual benefits of Civic Engagement

Volunteering facilitates positive outcomes for youth in the areas of economic involvement and civic participation. Youth who are civically engaged are less likely to experience disconnection from education and employment.

- For White low-income youth, the effect is from 19.3% to 11.9%
- For Black low-income youth, the effect is from 27.7% to 17.8%
- For Hispanic low-income youth, the effect is from 20.9% to 13%

The Collective benefits of Civic Engagement

The research found an overall positive relationship between volunteer rates and a state's opportunity score. Higher levels of volunteerism are associated with lower rates of income inequality and youth who are disconnected from employment, education, and civic participation. Volunteerism in the civil and social service sector is linked to greater economic opportunity than volunteerism in other sectors.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Volunteerism creates "opportunity pathways" toward positive educational, economic and social outcomes for those who are able to participate. Marginalized young people often lack the social networks that facilitate access to meaningful voluntary work. The research emphasizes the importance of supporting marginalized young people to benefit from the opportunity to meaningfully volunteer. Individuals who volunteer build skills and personal and professional networks. Increased membership in civic and service organizations produces higher levels of economic opportunity for communities.

You can use this research to consider avenues by which you can create volunteer opportunities for youth. Meaningful civic

engagement can help youth develop networks, enhance their work skills, and foster leadership qualities that would see them participate in the development of their communities.

You can connect with business leaders and employers across various sectors and work to co-design mentorship programs for youth.

Technology can be used to create a wide-range of network opportunities for youth. You can contribute to the research literature on civic engagement and youth well-being by documenting the effectiveness of your programs because this research drew largely from official data sources. Documentation of culturally sensitive and non-traditional youth engagement initiatives will benefit the youth sector tremendously.



Jordan, J. & Krumnow, R. (2014). *Connecting youth and strengthening communities*. Opportunity Nation in partnership with Measure of America.

FIND IT ONLINE

<https://opportunitynation.org/power-of-civic-engagement/>