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Working and Learning Together for Equitable Impact

An Impact Assessment of Intergenerational
Civic Partnerships in The Civic Spring Project

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Working and Learning Together for Equitable Impact: An Impact Assessment of Intergenerational Civic Partnerships in The Civic Spring Project

Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the impact of the Civic Spring Project, an initiative conducted by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars (C&S) in the summer of 2020. Amid the dual crises of racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic, Civic Spring provided grants to support the work of six community-based intergenerational teams across the United States (US) to provide youth with civic and leadership development opportunities, advance community-based civic work aiming to address pandemic-related needs, and promote voter engagement in the November 2020 general election. Through its support of each grantee, Civic Spring sought to address the gaps in our understanding of civic learning, reduce barriers to equitable civic access, and build sustainability in the civic engagement space.

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) team had a two-fold role in this project, providing technical assistance and evaluation. First, we partnered with each organization to encourage capacity-building. We helped organizations implement strategies for measuring impact and develop theories of change. Second, as the evaluation partner, the CIRCLE team assessed the overall reach, depth, and sustainability to describe the impacts of the Civic Spring initiative. We triangulated across diverse qualitative and quantitative data to identify findings, key lessons learned, and implications for future civic projects.

By working with local government to shape policy and promoting youth media creation, grantees engaged in a variety of projects that honed young peoples' civic skills, knowledge, and dispositions. Minnesota Young Champions organized for policy change in their state, advocating for unemployment benefits for young people. Kinston Teens helped increase local civic knowledge among young North Carolinians and registered young people in advance of the 2020 elections. The Institute of Engagement expanded opportunities for young people to engage in media creation and document their communities through local journalism. Newark OneStop created a summer fellowship for young leaders exploring civic engagement through a multidisciplinary lens. Groundwork Elizabeth lobbied local government officials to establish more spaces for youth voice in government, inspiring the creation of a permanent Youth Council. The Kentucky Student Voice Team researched student experiences to understand how youth civic learning was affected by the pandemic and communicated those findings to policymakers.

As an innovative project unique in scope and goals, Civic Spring highlighted the power of intergenerational partnerships, youth leadership, and extracurricular learning. The grantees showcased a diversity of contexts in which civic learning can occur, from advocating for policy change to teaching about local government. We found that participants also honed a variety of civic skills, including their social-emotional learning capacities, their abilities to navigate civic institutions, and their strategies for working with stakeholders. We also observed how organizations' work achieved reach, depth, and sustainability. Through innovative social media strategies, promotion of youth in journalism, and dozens of earned media appearances, grantees like Minnesota Youth Champions, Institute of Engagement and the Kentucky Student Voice Team extended their reach by generating awareness. Many grantees also performed work that made a deep impact on their communities; for instance, Newark OneStop forged deep partnerships with youth organizers and provided mentorship and financial support as they worked to reimagine their civic possibilities.

Finally, grantees used the funding and resources from Civic Spring to build sustainable platforms and infrastructure. Some of these shifts towards sustainability were structural. By providing voter engagement training and capacity building for its youth participants, Kinston Teens laid the foundation for increased voter participation in its community. Groundwork Elizabeth's efforts to establish permanent spaces for youth voice in local government will offer lasting opportunities for young people to further contribute to policymaking. Other shifts were cultural: grantees were able to transform our understanding of youth leadership and expertise. In doing so, they compelled their community members and even Civic Spring stakeholders to grapple with power dynamics and acknowledge privileges of age, race/ethnicity, and gender in civic projects.

These tensions were especially salient within the Community of Practice (CoP), a series of meetings during which participants across the Civic Spring landscape could reflect upon their experiences, engage in cross-cutting dialogue, and acquire civic skills through co-learning. The CoP was a great first step, highlighting the promise of intergenerational communities for co-learning and civic development. We further believe it is possible to bolster the impact of communities of practice in the civic learning space by allocating more resources, in partnership with youth, to build a stronger, more equitable community.

The Civic Spring project had lofty goals, and its successes are evident in the transformative work of its six grantee members and the multitude of civic learning moments that occurred throughout the summer of 2020. This project also revealed opportunities for improvement; future civic spaces must interrogate power and equity in intergenerational spaces, invest in sustainable community-building, and broaden conceptions of civic learning. Overall, Civic Spring demonstrated the vast promise of intergenerational spaces and communities of practice, and it provided a path forward for equitable civic spaces that fortify youth power.

Based on our findings, we make the following **recommendations**:

- 1. Define and measure civic learning through an inclusive lens and long-range view.** This project opened up several possibilities for rethinking what civic competencies mean and which are important for young people who are learning about the systems that affect their communities. Because Civic Spring possibly catalyzed changes in short-term and long-term ways, it's important to follow up with each community to understand and document the impact of these early investments. Further explorations of civic measures, especially with youth inputs, would help advance the field's ability to measure relevant civic capabilities that help young people become effective civic actors.
- 2. Embrace the equity-advancing value of time, flexibility, and depth that out-of-school civic learning can offer to optimize learning and impact.** The time, flexibility, and space for exploration that the Civic Spring grants afforded the grantees enabled them to teach concrete facts about the ways in which governments and community organizations and leaders operate, helping young people gain deep working civic knowledge. Thus, the field of civic learning should view out-of-school civic learning as a highly valuable and equity-advancing site of civic learning and engagement that may successfully engage young people with various academic accomplishments and dispositions.

3. **Build in a Community of Practice in youth programs to build bonding, linking, and bridging social capital within the Community of Practice.** The Civic Spring CoP served as a “proof of concept” for intergenerational communities of civic practice in which participants holding different structural power, authority, and perspectives came together, providing an environment for building bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Putnam, 2000; Stone & Hughes, 2002). The field of civic learning should consider creating more opportunities for young people and their adult partners to develop and participate in communities of practice. This project showed that a community of practice can provide a unique opportunity for adults and young people to learn and reflect alongside one another.
4. **Strive for a full partnership with young people through transparency.** Both young and older people learned valuable skills and lessons through Civic Spring, in part because it created spaces for intergenerational partnerships. Some grantees had near-peers—young adults who occupied an in-between space between youth and adults—in key positions that helped nurture these partnerships, often by acting as an important bridge with whom both younger and older members of the group could relate. In designing an intergenerational partnership, it is important to strive for transparency and intentionality in selecting who would be part of a group and which roles people play. For instance, some young people found their label as “youth” to be irrelevant and even to put harmful constraints on the partnership because much was assumed about them and their capabilities from that label.
5. **To work towards equity in access to civic spaces, pay young people—especially young people from marginalized backgrounds—for their time spent on civic work.** Most “professional” civic workers get paid for the work they do but it is sometimes not the case, where “summer internships” are unpaid and seen as an enrichment opportunity for young people. However, this type of internship is not accessible to many young people and being paid for their time dedicated to civic work was the only way many young people participating in Civic Spring. It is imperative that stipends to young people be made available.
6. **Create clear structure and goals, with invitation for co-design and revision.** The group spent a considerable amount of time setting norms to build a community because members initially did not know one another. At the same time, not being clear on the objectives or scope of the group’s charge can make participants feel uneasy and potentially hinder their active participation and contributions. Thus, a community of practice, especially happening in a condensed amount of time, could start by being transparent about the planned arc of activities and goals would be for each session, with a clear invitation for participants to suggest changes, so that the group can accomplish its key objectives.
7. **Assume plurality in participants’ comfort with requesting and sharing power.** Because the Civic Spring grantees ranged from youth-operated nonprofits to adult-directed youth programs, participants came in with different expectations about sharing power across age and positions, which did lead to meaningful reflection and learning.

Future Communities of Practice should assume that young people vary in their ability to use their voice and agency to ask for power-sharing from adults. Building in support for young people who may still be developing these skills by mentoring, peer modeling and explicit teaching could bolster the value of Community of Practice for all participants.

8. **Embed cross-organization collaboration and community-building among youth into the work of CoP.** The time together in CoP could be leveraged further as opportunities to expand civic skills and cross-organizational ties and authentic peer connections. Many youth in Civic Spring valued opportunities to work directly with peers and expressed desire for more informal communication avenues, a directory of participants' contact information, more consistent attendance, or meetings in smaller, more intimate groups. Future communities of practices should integrate opportunities to develop authentic social and professional connections between members and encourage determining and implementing clear rules and expectations about connecting on a personal level.
9. **Create an infrastructure and funding for longer-term communities of practice to support youth-driven civic work.** The short time that Civic Spring grantees spent in a community of practice revealed both the profound potential of CoP and the findings offer implications that can make CoPs more effective. For this potential to be realized, we recommend that there be a great investment of time, resources, and emphasis placed on designing and facilitating communities of practice with leadership of young people who are supported by advisers ranging in ages and expertise. Funding should be allocated at the level that would allow for sufficient personnel (including youth advisors) to be spent on planning and facilitation.

Introduction

Since the founding of the United States, Americans have worked to prepare youth to contribute to civic life and built a public school system accordingly (Allen 2016; Mann, 1867;). However, scholars and American people alike have disagreed about civic learning approaches and purposes (e.g., shifting the center of power in society or supporting existing civic institutions) (e.g., Allen, 2016; Kahne et al., 2015; Petrilli & Finn, 2020), and limited research has explored equity in civic learning (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Instead, marginalized youths' lived experiences and community knowledge often goes unrecognized in civic learning and civic action spaces (Cohen, et al., 2018). The youth civic development ecosystem comprises several settings, including school-based civic education, youth organizing, youth development, and community change initiatives. Across these settings, the extent to which civic engagement is tied to civic learning and the extent to which youth expertise is centered varies widely.

Although K-12 schools reach the vast majority of students in the U.S., and most students receive some type of civic education in middle and high school, it does not mean all students benefit from the civic education they receive. For instance, marginalized students are systematically less likely to receive high-quality civic education than more privileged and White students (Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013), and youth experiences and knowledge are often undervalued or invisible in civics curriculum (Cohen et al., 2018), with little to no direct youth inputs integrated into curriculum design. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve civic education opportunities for marginalized youth. Civic learning opportunities that occur during out-of-school time may be one opportunity to better support marginalized youth in their civic development and learning.

Authentic, collaborative, relational work among citizens and organizations can help promote social change (Levine, 2013). Thus, full, equal, and meaningful participation of youth in community design (Boyte, 2011) and civic learning could, theoretically, create more equitable and just communities. For this to succeed, comprehensive and developmental strategies that acknowledge youth development and youth expertise are needed to achieve meaningful youth-adult collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement in such social change projects (Benenson et al., 2016; Checkoway, 1996; Hart & Youniss, 2018; Levine, 2013; Yosso, 2005). The most promising intergenerational partnerships have developmentally engaging and appropriate activities that support and build youth leadership and contribution (Ginwright & James 2002; Mitra 2008; Sherrod et al., 2002; Zaff et al., 2017); diverse and repeated opportunities for mattering and meaning-making (Saito, 2006); and broader connection to leaders and stakeholders in the community (Hart & Youniss, 2018). Youth-adult partnerships and youth engagement can shift the landscape of a city and assert the role of youth as stakeholders, not simply as sources of feedback (Sirianni & Schor 2009).

There are significant gaps in our collective understanding of both the potential of intergenerational partnerships for civic learning—especially in out-of-school contexts—and the impacts such learning-and-working partnerships can accomplish. In a review essay, Vinnakota (2020) identified current critical tensions in the civic learning field and argued for a broader and deeper definition of civic education that includes the civic learning that occurs outside of schools in community-based settings. The Civic Spring initiative addresses some of these tensions identified in Vinnakota (2020)'s comprehensive landscape analysis, including balancing national infrastructure for civic learning with being grounded in local knowledge and local work;

balancing working towards immediate impacts to address urgent issues with working towards sustained change; and diversifying the civic learning sphere by centering historically marginalized perspectives, including youth more generally and focusing particularly on increasing representation of youth of color, low-socioeconomic position youth, and rural youth. The Civic Spring initiative, in short, set out to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge, to act as a logical next step in addressing some of those tensions, and to support community-led response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately negatively affected young people from marginalized communities and communities of color in the US.

The Institute for Citizens & Scholars, with a cross-sector steering committee, including young activists and leaders, created the Civic Spring project in 2020 to support the work of 6 initiatives (each led by non-profit organizations) that were led by or sought to partner with, mentor, and involve young people in civic work responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the 2020 election. All projects involved out-of-school civic learning in community-based settings (e.g., while addressing the identified need related to the COVID-19 pandemic in their community and/or promoting voter engagement). In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and a nearly unprecedented cry for racial justice, especially from youth (Kiesa, 2020), there is an urgent need to fundamentally improve the ways in which civic education serves low-income youth and youth of color.

Theoretical Framework

The Civic Spring Project was designed to build upon promising practices at the intersection of civic education and community-based civic work, in the context of organizations facilitating intergenerational partnerships focused on addressing youth-centered needs. As such, our research is informed by four major theoretical frameworks that offer a range of complementary civic development and civic engagement perspectives: positive youth development (PYD; Lerner 1994; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), civic development typology (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), sociopolitical development (Watts et al., 2003; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and public work (Boyte, 2011). Together, these frameworks encompass a range of developmental aims of structured civic engagement and education opportunities designed for youth (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Summary of Theoretical Frameworks Relevant to Civic Spring

Role of community members	Develop Some Civic Knowledge? (Yes or No)	Take responsibilities	Participate with others	Question the status quo	Critical Action against Systems	Co-construct future of the community
Positive Youth Development (Lerner, 1994)	No					
Civic development (Kahne & Westheimer, 2004)	Yes					
Critical praxis (Ginwright, 2003; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003)	Sometimes					
Public work (Boyte, 2011)	Sometimes					
Case Studies Organizations	Yes					
Key Developmental Outcome	Knowledge of civic institutions	Character	Efficacy	Critical thinking	Power-building	Civic imagination

PYD theory emphasizes growing youth assets and focuses primarily on developing personal skills and dispositions (CASEL, 2020; Lerner 1994). Some PYD frameworks include contribution to civil society as an important developmental accomplishment (Lerner et al., 2005), but focus less on systems or active questioning of power structures.

Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) widely used framework identifying three types of citizens builds upon and extends beyond PYD. Their category of "Responsible" youth overlaps with PYD's Caring, Connection and Contribution dispositions (Lerner, 1994). Young people in the "Participatory" citizen category use relevant skills and knowledge to take organized action like mobilizing peers. Lastly, the "Justice-oriented" youth identify root causes of unjust outcomes and take action.

The sociopolitical development (SPD) framework (Watts et al., 2003; Watts & Flanagan, 2007) builds upon the justice-oriented model of civic actors, focusing on supporting learning to change systems. SPD acknowledges that marginalized youth already have relevant knowledge from their own experiences of oppression (Cohen et al., 2018) that they can apply as they learn more about power and systems of oppression towards the goal of taking collective action (Seider & Graves, 2020) to address structural determinants of inequality (El-Amin et al., 2017; Johnson, 2005). Because redistributing power and changing systems are key goals of this approach, SPD also aligns with democratic education, which posits that non-repressive, anti-oppressive settings and conversations across difference are essential in order to continue to improve democracy (e.g., Gutmann, 1987; Hess & MacAvoy, 2014), despite resistance from those currently in power (e.g., adults; Kirshner et al., 2021).

Covering a wider range of developmental targets but without an explicit focus on challenging power structures, the Public Work theory posits that citizens are the "foundational agents of democracy" (Boyte & Kari, 1996; Boyte, 2011) who must sometimes redesign their government. This goes beyond developing civic knowledge and skills or working for system change and instead places everyday people at the center of decision-making. This positions youth as equal stakeholders in community design but does not emphasize their unique insights. To complement the Public Work framework, we also draw from theories of participation and inclusion: participation referring to when people with less power provide input to those with more power, compared to inclusion, where people with less power co-define and co-address the issues at hand, and multiple ways of knowing are valued (Quick & Feldman, 2011). We also draw from the theory of generative interactions, which identifies organizational conditions that can help foster equity and inclusion, including pursuing a shared purpose, frequently interacting with different individuals over extended periods of time, creating equal structures for people from different groups, and encouraging collaborative interdependence (Bernstein et al., 2019).

Overview of the Civic Spring Project

Overview. The Civic Spring Project (C&S) was an initiative developed by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars to support projects responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the 2020 election that involved intergenerational partnerships and promoted civic learning. In addition to providing financial support via a grant, C&S also hosted a Community of Practice (CoP) consisting of participants from each grantee organization, Institute for Citizens & Scholars staff, and staff from CIRCLE. Additionally, CIRCLE provided grantees with capacity-building support to refine their theory of change, develop aligned metrics, and evaluate the project's impact on participants and their community through their summer projects.

Core grantee activities. The six Civic Spring grantee organizations were selected from over 200 applicants through a national open request for proposals process. The organizations ranged in size and leadership models, from smaller, youth-founded and operated organizations to a statewide advocacy group. For example, Kinston Teens, a youth-founded and operated organization, worked to mobilize local youth as community organizers ahead of the 2020 election. Groundwork Elizabeth is a chapter of a national network which hosted a summer youth program where young people developed youth-focused recommendations to the city's 10-year plan to address local environmental and health-related inequity issues. In Minnesota, Minnesota Young Champions work to promote equity among low-income youth and youth of color and, for this project, has partnered with a well-established youth-centered nonprofit organization to advocate for expanding unemployment benefits to high school youth who lost their jobs in the pandemic. Newark OneStop partnered with the Abbott Leadership Institute and the Gem Project¹ to support 90 young organizers through a multifaceted fellowship program involving participatory action research, career development, and art and media production in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kentucky Student Voice Team documented the experiences of Kentucky public school students during the COVID-19 pandemic and shared their survey and interview research with the state Board of Education and other stakeholders to advocate for improvements for pandemic schooling. Institute of Engagement engaged Houston-area youth in civic spaces from which they have historically been excluded, including media and public health, to showcase youth insights. Additional information about each grantee can be found online: <https://civic-spring.org/>.

Community of practice. In addition to the separate work that each grantee did, there was also a grantee-wide CoP. The CoP was a series of six 60- to 75-minute Zoom meetings attended by youth and adult members of the six grantee organizations, C&S staff, three independent facilitators hired by C&S, and CIRCLE staff. The initial agreement was for each organization to send 3-5 consistent representatives, but it was announced in the first meeting that attendance would be more flexible to extend the opportunity to more interested participants. Aside from two meetings partially or fully facilitated by youth members of the grantee organizations, the CoP was planned and led by a facilitation team contracted by C&S. The facilitation team was composed of two youth co-chairs, Andrew Brennen and Merrit Jones, who share extensive experience in the youth civic engagement field and a prominent scholar and practitioner of intergenerational partnerships, Dan Hart, serving as an advisor. The most consistent element of the CoP—happening in almost every meeting—was the Rose, Bud, Thorn activity, where, in breakout sessions, two grantee organizations would be placed together to reflect and discuss their recent positives (roses), areas for growth (buds), and challenges (thorns). Afterwards, there were discussions as a whole group or in breakout rooms about various topics. The first two meetings were dedicated to the creation of norms and expectations for the CoP experience, the second two were youth-facilitated discussions about power, and the final two were centered around reflection on the Civic Spring project as a whole.

¹ The City of Newark, NJ, has an established partnership network with support of the Mayor, and both the Gem Project and Abbott Leadership Institute collaborate with Newark OneStop. Though each entity offers its own programming, participants in any of the programs may participate in some activities offered by another program. Our team worked with all three groups from Newark.

The Community of Practice sought to foster cross-learning and co-reflection across the grantee organizations. The purpose of this appeared to be two-fold: to act as a system of support for grantees and to strengthen the civic field more broadly. The CoP gave grantees access to a communal reflective space to think critically about the broader implications of their work. Such spaces are common in the nonprofit, advocacy, and education spheres but are more often geared toward adult work than youth-centered or intergenerational spaces. The intergenerational and youth-driven CoP was designed to especially encourage young people from many different backgrounds to learn from and support one another. In turn, this could develop cross-project connections, allowing for a system of support that could extend beyond the scope of the Civic Spring project. The CoP also provided a space for C&S to check in with and provide information to grantees. C&S had also planned for the CoP to play a communications role, producing outputs such as a social media campaign, impact report, and media pitches that would present a narrative about the power of youth-centered and community-based civic learning.

CIRCLE's Role in the Project

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States. We conduct extensive research on youth participation and leverage that research to improve opportunities for all young people to acquire and use the skills and knowledge they need to meaningfully participate in civic life. In all of our work, we are especially concerned with understanding, addressing, and ultimately eliminating the systemic barriers that keep some young people marginalized from and underrepresented in civic life. CIRCLE is based at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life.

CIRCLE had a dual role during the project. First, CIRCLE provided capacity building focusing on evaluation to the grantee organizations. We did this by assigning three senior staff members to work closely with the organizations to understand their programs, define their theories of change, and teach them strategies for evaluating outcomes of interest. Each senior staff member was assigned two organizations which they followed through the program. The CIRCLE team also participated in a series of planning and strategic meetings with all grantees to assist with capacity building and respond to each organization's strengths and challenges when appropriate. Second, CIRCLE served as the evaluation partner to understand the overall impact and reach of the Civic Spring initiative. Specifically, this meant that CIRCLE focused on evaluating whether and to what extent civic learning took place via a portfolio-wide evaluation as well as an evaluation of the Community of Practice.

Objectives

Our Key Objectives of this report are to: (1) Ascertain whether and how civic learning can effectively happen outside of formal school settings where civics is taught as part of a formal curriculum. For this objective, we examine the types of civic competencies and a sense of belonging and community responsibility developed by the participants by the end of the program period (summer) and whether these competencies were retained. (2) Explore what impactful intergenerational partnerships look like. For this domain, we synthesize our findings from multiple sources, including grantee reports, surveys, and the Community of Practice focus group. (3) Identify key lessons and implications from this youth-led initiative that can be implemented by Citizens & Scholars and other entities that support youth civic learning. In this section, we identify key lessons learned across the initiative, including for CIRCLE as a long-standing

stakeholder in youth civic engagement and learning, that we believe can help inform future funding, research, and practice.

Methods

Our overall research design was multi-method, drawing quantitative and qualitative data from multiple primary and secondary sources. We surveyed program participants twice (immediately after the summer programming in September 2020 and again in December 2020), conducted a focus group and interviews using protocols that were developed in partnership with an advisory group, helped to track impact data (e.g., event participation, winning a lawsuit, social media followers), and reviewed grantee reports. We synthesized information for the portfolio-wide results from the grantee reports submitted to C&S as well as a post-program survey developed by CIRCLE to measure constructs such as civic duty, civic skills, and personal responsibility. Specifically, we looked for common themes in outcomes and lessons learned. Each grantee, sometimes with CIRCLE research staff's support, developed metrics used to assess program impact. These metrics spanned a wide range with regards to the type and format but converged around a common framework of "reach," "depth" and "sustainability." At the same time, we collected and called out unique information and narratives that came from each grantee program to highlight the diversity and richness of the Civic Spring grantee cohort.

For the purpose of assessing how the CoP developed over time, we attended every meeting of the Community of Practice, gathering qualitative data from our observations and from an Exit Ticket exercise that participants were asked to complete at the end of each meeting. Following the final CoP session, we convened an advisory group spearheaded by younger community participants in a series of four meetings, seeking reflection and input on how to evaluate the CoP. We then drafted guidelines for a roundtable discussion with a larger group of CoP participants from every grantee, spanning all ages and roles. Last, we conducted interviews with C&S staff and CoP facilitators to understand their objectives and garner their reflections on the CoP's successes and areas for growth. For more details, please refer to Appendix A.

Findings

Civic Learning Occurs in Diverse Contexts

Civic Spring grantees created diverse civic learning opportunities by mixing learning about how government, policies and city procedures work in the context of the civic work that they were doing each day. Ninety-six percent of the participants said they were learning what would typically be part of a Civics class (systems of government, how civic procedures work, and discussions about societal and political issues) during their Civic Spring projects while the types of civic work varied greatly across grantees. This demonstrates the fact that meaningful civic learning can take place outside of the formal school setting contexts, including informal contexts outside of school and youth-led contexts. For example, participants learned how the government worked in many different settings, including by covering government actions as youth journalists for a youth-led media outlet with the Institute of Engagement and through the creation of issue briefs about systemic racism in healthcare, education, and criminal justice by Gem Project fellows. Others learned as active participants in civic processes, including as youth organizers for a state-level policy change with the youth-led Minnesota Young Champions, and when members of the Kentucky Student Voice Team shared findings from their study of youth experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic with policymakers in Kentucky. In another example of increased civic knowledge, Groundwork Elizabeth focused on youth learning about government structures and how to participate in government, so that they could then apply that knowledge in meetings with government officials. Some grantees got specific—for example, Kinston Teens assessed the local government knowledge of people connected to their programs, including members, staff, parents, board members, and volunteers. The survey confirmed certain gaps in civic knowledge based on age and participation in their programs. These discrepancies prompted their team to launch a website with local voting information ahead of the voter registration deadline and has helped them to identify ways to improve their ability to offer equitable civic learning and engagement throughout their community in the future. Creating tools to spread civic knowledge across the broader community, as this website does, is another way that young people in the Civic Spring programs gained civic knowledge. However, most grantees focused on building civic skills more than civic knowledge.

Participants Demonstrated and Gained Diverse Types of Civic Skills

Civic skills can be useful because they can be applied to civic work in both the near-term and long-term. Many kinds of skills are civic skills; grantees often focused on developing the civic skills most related to their programming or community action. For example, the Institute of Engagement centered much of their work around civic skills related to communication, including writing, editing, interviewing, and researching, which participants could practice through their journalism programs. Groundwork Elizabeth worked on civic skills that involved critical thinking and research, including the evaluation of sources. Both Groundwork Elizabeth and Kinston Teens emphasized enhancing public speaking skills, which participants used to engage with elected officials and community members. The Gem Project encouraged developing creative expression skills, exploring how art and media creation can promote social justice and civic engagement. The Kentucky Student Voice Team and Abbott Leadership Institute worked with adult research partners to expand participants' quantitative and qualitative research skills and the communication skills required to synthesize and disseminate such research, ranging from

events and presentations to digital media storytelling. This range of examples shows the varying approaches that young people can use when engaging in civic work.

While there were lots of different approaches to building civic skills, we included measures of more generic civic skills in our survey and found that civic skills were relatively high at both points of follow-up (mean: 7.1 out of 10 for the September survey and mean of 6.5 out of 10 for the December survey; difference is not statistically significant). Such skill-based specialization in youth-focused organizations offers a model of how extracurricular civic learning can be centered around young people's interests (and even desired career paths). In fact, the Abbott Leadership Institute reflected seeing quieter young people become leaders when they were able to participate in more specialized tracks added by the program. In-school civic education, by design, is often rigid in its structure, scope, and sequence, forcing it to take a one-size-fits-all model to civic learning. This is in part because state standards and mandates must be met, and students and teachers must complete a set of activities within a class period and come back the next day. In contrast, out-of-school civic learning, especially in the context of the summer program of Civic Spring, seemed to allow young people to reach their full potential and drive the program or at least have a considerable input as to when and what the group would do. For instance, and hypothetically, if a group member shared that they were having a bad day, the rest of the group could pause and express their support and care for as long they needed to. If a member of the group had a life story to tell because they were ready to do so, the group would also be able to respond and listen. We heard similar anecdotes to these hypothetical examples, which speaks volume about the potential of civic learning-and-working space outside of school, to cultivate a supportive space that shapes itself to be what they need when they need it. In fact, 86% and 79% of participants in September and December, respectively, agreed or strongly agreed that Civic Spring helped them to gain important life skills such as taking care of their mental health. The longer time allocated to work together (usually full or half-day programming) on a mission-driven project likely facilitated this process. This flexibility in the civic workspace may have also helped to ensure that young people from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and academic achievement levels could come together and add unique value to the work of the group. Literature on neurobiology of learning is consistent with the idea that the time and space the Civic Spring grantee projects were able to afford for the participants program, namely, that emotional engagement and positive climate for support is a key to unlock students' engagement and learning potential (Cavanaugh, 2016; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2019), and programs that intentionally combines social-emotional learning with civic engagement and action has shown positive impact (Andolina & Conklin, 2020).

Many organizations cited supporting youth to bolster working knowledge and skills of civic participation and leadership through meaningfully engaging with members of their communities (especially elected officials). Many grantees typically saw their programming within a theory of change to build civic capacities for the entire ecosystems. For instance, training young community organizers or young documentarians/journalists, and/or connecting young people to public officials after teaching them about how local governments make decisions can all lead to increased skills in working with public officials and other stakeholders, thereby adding to the pipeline of civic actors playing various roles all for the well-being of the community.

Youth-Centered Civic Initiatives Can Have Broad and Deep Community Impacts

Scale of Reach

Each grantee demonstrated an impressive level of reach of their programs. In our survey, 61% of Civic Spring participants surveyed said that they often or very often helped make their city or town a better place for people to live. This ranged from conducting community research, publishing it, and presenting it to stakeholders locally and state-wide to publishing and presenting issue briefs to city leaders. Other projects showed reach through educating young people on civic knowledge and skills and having them practice those skills directly in their communities through events such as voter registration drives, securing seats for youth on local government committees, and delivering food to those in need.

One way that grantee organizations extended their reach was via media outlets. For example, ShiftPress content (developed as part of Institute of Engagement's work) was displayed to social media users over 63,000 times. The Kentucky Student Voice Team's research received coverage from 25 different local and national news outlets. This media attention added to the extensive reach of the 25+ events they hosted on both national and local levels that had over 1,500 participants in total. The Gem Project also successfully hosted an online rally, now viewed over 800 times, where they presented demands based on policy briefs and spoke to local leaders within the sectors of education, health, and justice. Based on their theory of change, which included raising public awareness and youth awareness of the fact that high school students were excluded from the pandemic-related unemployment benefits, Minnesota Young Champions' work was covered extensively in major state and national media including *New York Times*, *Star Tribune*, and ABC News among others, for a total of 47 earned-media and op-eds. Additionally, their 270 unique social media posts and videos that reached nearly 50,000 views. Although the team faced many obstacles such as not being able to launch a messaging campaign on social media and finding it extremely difficult to register marginalized youth online, they ultimately sued the state of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled that high school students who lost their jobs due to the pandemic were in fact eligible to receive benefits, bringing equitable unemployment benefits for their fellow students across the state, not just in Minneapolis.²

Depth of Impact

In addition to achieving reach, grantees also had substantial depth to their civic work. For example, Institute of Engagement ShiftPress fellows documented complex civic issues, including the pandemic experiences of members of marginalized communities, including refugee youth in Houston, TX. Similarly, the Kentucky Student Voice Team members extensively documented the experiences of Kentucky students during the pandemic and used those findings to inform policymakers. Others reached people through organizing and voter engagement. Minnesota Young Champions recruited young Minnesotans to engage in advocacy work to extend unemployment benefits to young people. By elevating 10 young members into leadership positions, Minnesota Young Champions built youth capacity and reached a wider network of over 200 young people who participated in their events, demonstrating the power of peer-to-peer outreach. Uniquely, the team attracted attendants who may not be naturally interested in political

²<https://www.startribune.com/minn-court-jobless-high-school-students-can-access-pandemic-unemployment-aid/573267141/>

issues by holding events where young people could hear and share stories about issues they care about, such as mental health, and had opportunities to register to vote while attending (in-person) events in the local community. We anticipate that the depth of these grantees' impacts will continue to manifest in the longer-term, and it will be worth continuing to monitor.

Sustainability of Change

Serious investment in youth-led community-based civic learning and work can lead to sustainable change. Grantees' collective impacts also touch on lasting changes in two ways. The organizations participating in the Civic Spring project showed their communities what informed, passionate, and dedicated young people can do, especially when they are given the resources to reach their full potential. One of the ways the Civic Spring project achieved sustainability is through **structural changes** in where, how, and when young people can have a say in what happens to their community. The work of the Groundwork Elizabeth youth pushed many local leaders to see the value and need for youth input in Elizabeth's government. One Elizabeth, NJ, City Councilwoman noted, "we need to find a way from this program surrounding our youth to be a permanent part of the city." Additionally, the mayor of Elizabeth established a permanent Youth Council that many Groundwork Elizabeth participants plan to serve on, creating a lasting platform for young people in the city. The Groundwork Elizabeth team has also developed a pathway into the County's Youth Service Commission, in which youth can advise multiple county-level departments.

Another type of change is more **cultural** in nature in that young people's work through these intergenerational partnerships set an example for youth-led changes and youth-centered voice, often shifting how older, powerful, and predominantly White leaders see young people, and especially young people of color. One participant from Minnesota Young Champions reflected, "I'm confident that I helped to, on a wide scale, teach top elected officials and other leaders, that young people are smart, serious and paying attention. I don't think they'll ignore us a second time." The Institute of Engagement's youth media products helped raise awareness about youth civic priorities and, in some cases, also corrected negative stereotypes about young people in the broader public. Gem Project's fellows organized a virtual rally, curated a virtual art exhibition, and released a series of issue briefs to mobilize their hometown of Newark, NJ, to stand up against racial injustice.³

Making changes and mobilizing action in the community requires **time and resources**, which can be challenging to sustain. For many grantees, the Civic Spring funding allowed existing and/or new staff members (some of whom were in high school or college or recent graduates) to dedicate a meaningful proportion of their time to work intensively and accomplish a lot of work mostly in the summer.⁴ Grantees often prioritized paying young people for their time, which made it possible for more youth, and more diverse youth, to participate. Given the relatively short-term nature of the funding, some grantees have been able to sustain or build upon their Civic Spring work, while others are not able to continue their Civic Spring programming without identifying new sources of funding. For example, the Kentucky Student Voice Team focused on training youth to conduct research. This was a highly time-intensive project that was designed to be contained within the funding period; however, youth will be able to continue to

³ The Gem Project (2021). "Reimagining Black Liberation through Afrofuturism." A Digital Art Exhibit. <https://thegemproject.org/rally2020/virtual-museum-black-liberation/>

⁴ Some groups' work extended into the fall, because their work plan included non-partisan voter registration and mobilization.

apply the skills they built in new settings, and the research products they generated will continue to influence education stakeholders and policymakers across the state, and they have established an important case for a youth-run nonprofit to wield political power, which organizations in other states could learn from.

In other cases, grantee organizations continue to sustain their community-building and change efforts in their local communities. For example, multiple grantees continue to work with their Civic Spring programming participants after the funding period ended. This appears to be, at least in some cases, because the participants are now seen as colleagues and partners who add value to the organization's ability to meet its core mission. In some cases, the community-building extended to leadership development. For example, the Kentucky Student Voice Team youth leaders trained their replacements, conducting peer-to-peer learning as participants age to help support continuity.

Lastly, sustainability also took place on the **individual** level, as organizations successfully fostered young people's sense of efficacy and self-esteem. In their grantee reports, most organizations wrote about how youth in their program were "primed" to continue this civic engagement. When prompted in our survey to reflect on a moment of learning from the Civic Spring project, one participant wrote that they learned "[that] building up one's confidence allows you to do anything that you determine in life." Others shared that the project helped them to find their voice or feel that it was valued, with over 90% of survey participants (93% in September and 96% in December) agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Civic Spring project helped them find or strengthen their own voice. Additionally, 100% of participants (in both survey waves) reported "pushing themselves to do something that was hard for them" and "doing something really well or something that seemed impossible" which strongly indicates that young people experienced important development tasks like perseverance and personal growth because real-world civic work is often difficult and clearly they had to stretch themselves to accomplish what they set out to do. Through experiences that helped them to see their own power, the young people who participated in these projects have gained the skills and dispositions that will allow them to continue to be engaged civic actors beyond the Civic Spring project. Additionally, the emphasis by many organizations, the Institute for Citizens & Scholars included, on paying the young people they worked with is another way of showing young people that their work in civic spaces is valuable. Helping to make young people feel valued in their communities is important for creating sustainable change at the local level.

Despite some successes in shifting personal and community level value for youth voice, even the Civic Spring project wasn't enough to overcome the disconnect that some youth, particularly young people from marginalized backgrounds, feel from their communities. Using a composite measure examining sense of community across "membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection" (Chavis et al., 2008), we found that participants had a median score of a 6.3 out of 10, lower than the other indices that we measured. Even after engaging deeply with their communities through civic action projects, to some extent, Civic Spring participants still lacked a strong sense of connection to their community. This speaks to the importance of further investment in programs that try to improve how communities relate to their young people and vice versa.

Intergenerational Partnerships: A Worthwhile Challenge

In addition to promoting civic learning, Civic Spring was also interested in strengthening intergenerational partnerships for civic work and promoting co-leadership. Building and

maintaining such partnerships can be challenging but remain worthwhile. We highlight some of the learnings that emerged from this process. Some of the initiatives funded began as youth-led, but others had previously been led primarily by adults and worked to integrate youth co-leadership as part of their Civic Spring work.

Intergenerational and Peer Allyship

Working on developing partnership and allyship across age, organizational, and geographic diversity challenged participants to reflect upon power dynamics and interrogate misconceptions about others' abilities and expertise. At the conception of this study, the idea that older people who are in position of power (e.g., staff at a program, an adult administrator of a youth-run program) would always be "imparting their knowledge" to the younger generation was strongly ingrained in much of the literature we found in youth-adult partnership, and the measure we were able to find to gauge the value of intergenerational partnership focused exclusively on older adults' ability to be "adult allies" to young people. We (CIRCLE staff) were directly challenged to rethink this notion by the CoP facilitators and other young people because they felt that they were allies to each other and were also mentoring and teaching older adults in many ways. Based on our observations in the CoP meetings, we agreed, and shifted the original measure of "adult allyship" to a measure of participants' own assessment of their ability to listen to, respect and support young people, regardless of the participants' own age. Among participants, the overall median score for this scale was 7.8 out of 10, suggesting that many believed that they performed well at fostering allyship (as near peers and/or intergenerationally).

Although participants generally felt that they had the knowledge of what allyship looks like, many Civic Spring participants who were labeled as "youth," felt underserved in intergenerational partnerships and openly challenged grantees' existing models of partnership, highlighting the tensions that intergenerational work can create.

By centering issues of youth participation and agency in the CoP and the initiative as a whole, Civic Spring pushed adult-led organizations to reflect upon their models of youth participation and voice. In reflections, one grantee noted, "Adult allies had to frequently check-in on themselves and how they supported youth in their roles," to move beyond the starting mindset that adults were "keepers of knowledge" and to recognize the privileges they held over younger participants. The Kentucky Student Voice Team's youth researchers reflected that being viewed as partners in research rather than students by the adults that they worked with built their confidence, suggesting how horizontal models of learning and partnership between youth and adults, much like the type of relationship described as "developmental relationship" by Search Institute (2020), can promote growth and enable impact, perhaps more than hierarchical ones that mirror a school setting. Kinston Teens implemented tools used by the Community of Practice such as Rose, Bud, Thorn, youth-only meetings, and meetings where adults were present to listen and not speak, as interventions to enhance youth voice and improve their meetings' functioning. These examples show how meaningful intergenerational relationships require adults (and older youth) to approach their work with intentionality and care to ensure it remains genuinely youth-centered.

Uplifting near-peer relationships as a model for youth civic development.

Intergenerational allyship between near-peers rather than between youth and adults also took place in both youth-led and adult-led organizations. For instance, Institute of Engagement had slightly older youth (or emerging adults who identified as "in-between" the slippery binary of

youth and adult in this space) training younger youth to be community journalists. Groundwork Elizabeth created two paid Youth Leaders positions who were also emerging adults who supported youth throughout the project. During their final reflections, almost all of the youth participants of Groundwork Elizabeth's summer program "shouted out" the Youth Leaders for their leadership, appreciating the guidance, support, inspiration, and fun they brought to the program. This kind of near-peer leadership model helps to empower youth by providing role models with shared identities and interests who are deeply engaged in civic life. Beyond offering a glimpse at possible futures for participants, these leaders developed close personal relationships with youth, acting as a support system for both their civic work as well as challenges that the youth were facing outside of the project.

Creating environments that provide holistic and developmental support. The unique challenges of summer 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, yet another and highly visible violence against unarmed Black people, and scaling of the movement for racial justice, brought the importance of supporting youth emotionally and developmentally to the fore. Organizations used a variety of strategies to respond to "Zoom fatigue," mental health challenges, family problems, isolation, and more as part of their programming. This included creating time and space for reflection, decompressing, and community building (or as one organization called it, "allowing for humanity"); holding socially-distanced, in-person programming for participants to minimize feelings of isolation; and providing resources or mutual aid like Wi-fi hotspots, art supplies, food, masks, and hand sanitizer. While the summer of 2020 made youth mental health and well-being more salient, the results of these youth-focused organizations suggest that prioritizing youth mental health and wellbeing can bring benefits to youth's work and self-esteem.

Organizations also reflected on intentionally creating spaces that were designed to support youth, rather than try to force youth into adult spaces and roles. By the same token, it can be said that young people shared the wealth of knowledge they held, and shared it with their older colleagues, such as engaging meeting strategies, technology, and tools. For instance, the adults working with the Kentucky Student Voice Team adapted their typical communication styles to instead use Slack, meeting youth on a platform that they have more familiarity with. Institute of Engagement, Minnesota Young Champions, and Kinston Teens also reflected on their use of various technologies more often used by young people (such as Facebook and Facetime) to leverage the communication skill sets that many young people already have. Institute of Engagement also reflected on creating a space that was "Structured, yet Casual in Performance" as a way of pushing back against norms of professionalism and fostering a more inclusive learning space for all members of their team. These exchanges of knowledge and practice between civic actors of different generations came to work together, and often influenced how they work together, regarded each other's assets. This shows how even adult-led organizations can learn to value young people as both colleagues and developing people who have different needs, wants, and skills. Intergenerational organizations and work need to go beyond inclusion of youth into adult spaces and instead create intentional spaces where young people can learn, teach, and feel valued and adults are just as open to learn.

Understanding youth-adult dynamics in the CoP. Grantees also grappled with the youth-adult binary, and the challenges of using those labels. In CoP breakout sessions and activities, facilitators often created "youth" and "adult" affinity groups for participants.

Participants were asked at the beginning of each session to label themselves as “youth” or “adult” without guidance on what characteristics defined each group or in which ways these binaries would be operationalized. Many people found it helpful and useful to have separate spaces, citing feelings of safety and empowerment in spaces with people who looked more like them. In affinity spaces with fewer participants, young people felt more comfortable sharing opinions and speaking out. However, there were also moments in which this dichotomy felt forced or did not adequately describe the roles that different participants played both in their own organizations and in the CoP space. For instance, some participants who had graduated high school and were situated as “adult” figures within their organization felt misplaced when they were presumed to be youth. Other CoP participants, who would have categorized themselves as adults in other contexts, identified more strongly with the experiences and perspectives of youth group members and expressed discomfort sharing in the adult space.

Tensions also emerged between “youth” and “adult” participants over power imbalances between the two groups. For example, participants in the CoP roundtable and in the youth advisory group felt “othered” as youth group members, leading to perceptions of tokenization and alienation from the rest of the community. The project’s dual emphases on youth leadership and co-designed spaces amplified these tensions by counteracting each other. Participants were uncertain whether the CoP was supposed to be a youth-led space or an intergenerational space in which leadership was shared across all age groups. Without explicit assignment and demarcation of power, the adult group maintained age privilege in designing the CoP and in participation volume. Though this privilege was occasionally acknowledged in the context of youth civic spaces, efforts to diminish adult hegemony were met with pushback and engendered confusion among both “adult” and “youth” participants. For example, in one session facilitators asked adults to ask questions only and cede the discussion space to the youth participants. As a consequence, adult group members said they felt uncertain about their roles in communal activities and less welcomed in the discussion.

Communities Of Practice Are Promising But Require Deliberate Co-Development

Communities of practice can build skills and facilitate adoption of youth-forward techniques. Different stakeholders prioritized different goals for the CoP, with some overlap. In the initial planning document developed by C&S and the facilitation team, the primary goals were for the CoP to be a youth-led space focused on cross-project learning, public-facing storytelling, and the development of a national social network among participants. They also expressed that facilitators would develop goals and norms jointly with participants, which happened in the first two CoP meetings. In the CoP’s kick-off meeting, each participant shared what they hoped to get out of the experience. Uplifting youth voice, learning and problem solving, and creating connections were the most common goals expressed by participants. These closely mirror those outlined in the planning document, with the omission of storytelling, likely because C&S was more invested in public-facing messaging about the grants than participants. One final goal that was primarily expressed informally in the evaluation process by the CoP facilitation team was reflection, both about the grantees’ experiences and how those experiences intersect with systems of power and oppression.

Co-design. While the principles of co-design were raised by C&S staff and facilitators during the planning of the CoP, the initial CoP sessions had few co-designed elements. The same behaviors regarding CoP planning were interpreted differently-- the CoP planners intended for flexibility and responsiveness, but CoP participants perceived this as unclear purpose and lack of

intentionality in the planning, schedule, design, and implementation of the CoP. Different stakeholders held different goals and they were communicated at different times and through different fora. Participants said they did not know or were unclear about what constituted a co-designed civic space, or what their responsibilities and roles were in co-designing the CoP. When efforts were made to implement co-design in later CoP sessions, they were done haphazardly and non-uniformly. For instance, one CoP session was planned and led by the Institute of Engagement in August, and one was facilitated (but not planned) by members of the Kentucky Student Voice Team. The “discussion about” co-design appeared to exceed the extent to which the CoP executed the co-design in practice. Facilitators set the agenda and conducted most of the proceedings during each session. Reviewing the CoP, C&S staff members and facilitators themselves noted that because the roles of facilitators were held by young people, multiple generations inherently contributed to the CoP’s design to some extent. Although the facilitators were younger than other members labeled as adults, their positions of authority along with their seniority over younger CoP participants triangulated their status vis-a-vis the youth and adult groups, and participants found few avenues through which to offer input on its design. The CIRCLE team created an exit ticket to garner feedback from participants, which was intended as another opportunity to empower participants as designers of the CoP space. Yet, feedback was solicited at the very end of each session, by which time many participants had logged off, and no notable changes were made as the result of exit ticket feedback.

Building community. Hearing about other youth-led civic projects across the country was one of the highlights of the CoP experience for many participants. It helped members feel connected to a broader field of young people doing similar work while learning about the wide range of projects being led by youth in diverse parts of the country. However, for many participants, the “community” promised by the Community of Practice felt lacking, which impeded their ability to reap other potential benefits of the space. Participation was inconsistent, with only 37% of participants attending over half the meetings, and half of all participants only attending one meeting. While the shedding of initial rules about attendance was an effort to make the space accessible to all who wanted to take part, the result was a further dampening of the development of social connection and trust. The consequences of this lack of community include limited trust in fellow participants, discomfort offering transparent reflections or constructive feedback, and a decreased likelihood of continuation of these connections beyond the Civic Spring grant. Nevertheless, participants continued to feel that it was important to feel a sense of community with other Civic Spring community members after the grant concluded--72% in our post-survey and 70% in our follow-up survey felt it was very important or important.

Power dynamics. Relatedly, while the Community of Practice was intended to break down power differentials, such dynamics were not entirely eliminated. Attendees at CoP sessions included a mix of stakeholders with varying levels of power and influence. C&S staff, CIRCLE staff, and facilitators all held positions of authority in a variety of contexts, which created challenging social and professional pressures, especially for youth participants. Both youth and adult participants noted that they sometimes monitored their tone or censored themselves, because they didn’t want to reflect poorly upon their grantee organization. This moderation occurred even in youth spaces where there was no C&S staff present (but youth members of the facilitation team and CIRCLE present). Perceived judgment from powerful stakeholders seemed to prevent “authentic” opinions and modes of expression, while also militating against casual, cross-cutting relationship development between members of different organizations. As presence

at the CoP was part of the grant requirements and many C&S staff were there, participants reported that CoP sometimes felt like a performance.

Youth affinity spaces. Moments in which participants reported feeling the least amount of pressure was in youth affinity groups, during which no C&S staff (and few CIRCLE staff or facilitators) were listening in. Through talking to other youth at different grantee organizations, participants felt more empowered to express strong and even critical opinions due to the support from other young people with similar experiences and levels of power. However, power dynamics also arose in these youth-only spaces, as participants and facilitators observed the gaps in knowledge and experience between youth at different stages of their formal and informal education, civic work, and development of agency.

Co-learning. Despite emphasis during early sessions of the CoP on opportunities to learn and build skills, there ended up being fewer instances of co-learning and more instances of leaders sharing knowledge with participants. Participants wished that there was more opportunity to hear about the challenges each organization was facing, in order to learn together and collectively brainstorm solutions. Most of the activities focused on general themes from the project and shared experiences, with fewer deep dives into each organization's specific goals and challenges. This speaks to some confusion over the intent of the CoP: whether it was focused on the progress of grantee projects or transcended their project work to cover broader topics related to youth-led and intergenerational work.

The main vehicle for sharing personal experiences occurred during the Rose, Bud, Thorn icebreaker, during which participants shared positive moments (roses), negative moments (thorns), and future opportunities (buds). Yet some participants reflected that this exercise felt disingenuous and participants weren't always being transparent about challenges they were having, possibly reflecting a desire to be perceived well by C&S and the other grantees. One youth participant shared a story of giving advice to another grantee organization during Rose, Bud, Thorn and that organization becoming defensive. This left the individual feeling like the group didn't actually respect youth voices, causing the individual to silence themselves since they didn't want to waste any of their time collaborating with an organization that didn't respect them.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we make several recommendations regarding promoting civic learning, designing programs, and building communities of practice.

Promoting Civic Learning

Define and measure civic learning through an inclusive lens and long-range view.

The Civic Spring grantees worked as intergenerational teams in different types of organizations, regions and geography, and defined their civic work in different ways. If we only measured civic learning and impact using standardized instruments (e.g., validated surveys), we would have likely missed some of the richest types of civic work and learning that occurred in this program. For instance, we would have missed capabilities like choosing to ask for different ways to relate with adults who held more power (by default) in a shared space, and learning to express care for a teammate and making sure that the person who is struggling can still contribute would have been missed but arguably fall well within the bounds of civic developmental outcomes.

Furthermore, it will be important to monitor the extent to which this work can be sustained beyond the Civic Spring grant resources. It will be worth following these grantees' work to see if Civic Spring helped catalyze systematic shifts in how young people from diverse backgrounds and lived circumstances are seen and heard at the decision-making tables. Thus, further explorations of civic measures, especially with youth inputs, would help advance the field's ability to measure relevant civic capabilities that help young people become effective civic actors.

Embrace the equity-advancing value of time, flexibility, and depth that out-of-school civic learning can offer to optimize learning and impact. The time and space the Civic Spring grants afforded for the grantees enabled them to both teach concrete facts about the ways in which governments, community organizations and leaders operate, helping young people gain deep working civic knowledge. Another important aspect of these community-based, intergenerational civic projects is that individuals that may not be seen as leaders in a school setting could engage, learn, and lead in this initiative. That is because the programs could often allow flexibility and truly personalize the participants' civic learning and working experience by allowing them to specialize in something they were already good at, rather than trying to make sure that everyone had the same set of skills and had the same depth of knowledge about the same set of facts. Thus, the field of civic learning should view out-of-school civic learning as a highly valuable, and equity-advancing site of civic learning and engagement that may successfully engage young people with various academic accomplishments.

Designing Programs for Impact

Build in a Community of Practice in youth programs to foster bonding, linking, and bridging social capital within the Community of Practice. The Civic Spring Community of Practice served as a “proof of concept” for intergenerational communities of civic practice in which participants holding different structural power, authority, and perspectives came together, providing an environment for building, bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Putnam, 2000; Stone & Hughes, 2002), if the power dynamics in the group are acknowledged and then embraced as a learning opportunity for all. For instance, having a space where participants feel

safe in assuming some shared experiences (e.g., youth in this case) can bolster a sense of safety and trust (bonding capital), in turn facilitating deeper and more honest conversations or solution-focused discussions specific to the group. Intergenerational fora for discussion and reflection, on the other hand, could provide an opportunity for building some bridging social capital where participants draw from a wealth of knowledge that different groups hold to develop best solutions and outcomes (bridging capital). Finally, a community of practice, such as the one in Civic Spring, modeled and possibly built linking capital (Stones & Hughes, 2002). Some young people in the CoP modeled (in those meetings) how young people can carefully manage their relationship with adult stakeholders to gain access to resources and networks that they need to accomplish their youth-centered goal. This project showed that a community of practice can provide a unique opportunity for adults and young people to learn and reflect alongside one another. These opportunities would be best if young people drive the design with adult partners and they include introducing adults to the idea that they sometimes unknowingly exercise their privilege and power to the detriment of youth learning and contribution.

Integrate a deep commitment to transparency, equity in access and intentionality toward partnership with, not just including, young people. First, it is important to acknowledge that adults can (and should) be participating in civic learning in addition to young people. Some of the civic learning outcomes will be the same regardless of age, and others may depend on age. For example, youth have some areas of knowledge that adults don't have; the knowledge transfer goes both ways. In the future, we encourage grounding practice in the importance of adult civic learning (in addition to youth civic learning) and measuring impacts for all. Second, intergenerational spaces (including the individual grantee projects and the community of practice) are not necessarily natural—just the simple fact of creating an intergenerational space and asserting all participants have equal power challenges binaries and power structures that are deeply ingrained in our society. To have such a space be effective, it is essential to approach it with transparency and intentionality. Having time where there are subgroups based on both age and role can be helpful, but there needs to be intentionality behind this decision-making and acknowledgement of how maintaining such binaries uphold power structures that harm young people. Third, Civic Spring demonstrated the power of near-peer engagement, which should be continued in future civic projects. Some of the strongest moments of civic development within grantee programs transpired because younger “near-peer” Civic Spring members in leadership positions provided mentorship and learning opportunities for younger participants. As two younger people leading an intergenerational community, the leaders of the CoP successfully modeled near-peer leadership as well, bridging differences among members of different ages. Near-peer leadership in civic spaces not only empowered young people to engage, but it compelled others in the community to rethink age binaries and re-evaluate their expectations of what young people can contribute.

To work towards equity in access to civic spaces, pay young people—especially young people from marginalized backgrounds—for their time spent on civic work. There is a strong argument for continued need to invest in community-based civic work and learning initiatives because of the unique value that Civic Spring programs added to participants' civic learning and development, in addition to their impact on their community. Providing stipends to young people who spend a substantial amount of time on these initiatives is sometimes the only way to remove barriers to participation for people from working-class and low-socioeconomic

position backgrounds. Some grantees also paid young people as staff to support the growth and impact of the young people they engaged in the summer program, and C&S paid stipends to youth who participated in the CoP.

Designing Communities of Practice

Develop a clear structure and goals, with invitation for co-design and revision. The community of practice convened intergenerational teams from across the country who did not previously know one another and relatively few members had any prior experience participating in a community of practice. While the group spent a considerable amount of time setting norms to build a community, not being clear on the objectives or scope of the group's charge can make participants feel uneasy and potentially hinder their active participation and contribution. This may particularly be true when younger members of the group are accustomed to being shut down by older people when they had good ideas or felt disempowered in other domains of their lives. Thus, a community of practice, especially happening in a condensed amount of time, could start by making explicit what the arc of activities and goals would be for each session, with a clear invitation for participants to suggest changes, so that the group can accomplish its key objectives.

Assume plurality in participants' comfort with requesting and sharing power.

Because the Civic Spring grantees ranged from youth-operated organizations to adult-directed youth programs, with varying maturity in programming, it was clear that young people came in with varying sense of agency and confidence in challenging power. In the Civic Spring Community of Practice, such diversity led to a rich conversation and potentially deeper appreciation of the Civic Spring community as a site of co-teaching and learning that was not necessarily happening within each program. Future CoP's should assume that young people are not monolith in their ability to use their voice and agency to ask for power-sharing from adults. Building in support for young people who may still be developing these skills by mentoring, peer modeling and explicit teaching could bolster the value of Community of Practice for all participants.

Embed cross-organization collaboration and community-building among youth into the work of CoP. The time together in CoP could be leveraged further as opportunities to expand civic skills and cross-organizational ties. In Civic Spring, some, but not all, young people had a chance to co-design or facilitate the meeting. This experience was valued because young people collaborated with other young people from various grantee organizations to develop session goals and activities. Participants also recommended that the group create room for more social connections by opening informal communication avenues, a directory of participants' contact information, more consistent attendance, or meetings in smaller, more intimate groups. These connections, especially outside of the formal grantee meetings may feel "unprofessional" to older professionals but young people and emerging adults working on critical community issues may not always want the same type of work-and-life distinction many adults see as a professional etiquette. Rather than assuming what is and isn't appropriate for all participants, future communities of practice would be best served by discussing and setting shared norms around sharing information and connecting outside of CoP as these norms will certainly vary from group to group.

Create longer-term communities of practice to support youth-driven civic work. The short time that Civic Spring grantees spent in a community of practice revealed both the profound potential of CoP to add tremendous and unique value to local civic work and learning, by creating an authentic space for reflection, support, and problem-solving can and should be an integral part of future civic projects. For this potential to be realized, we recommend that there be a great investment of time, resources, and emphasis placed on designing and facilitating communities of practice with leadership of young people who are supported by advisers ranging in ages and expertise. Funding should be allocated at the level that would allow for sufficient personnel (including youth advisors) to be spent on planning and facilitation. Ideally, future projects with longer engagement period (i.e., 12 months or more) should seek to include participants in the visioning and creation of its CoP to establish authentic and well-defined processes. Because the CoP was such an innovative and integral part of the Civic Spring project, the lessons learned from this project could be used to draw a model of community of practice for youth-centered civic learning and civic work initiative for the greater field of civic learning.

Conclusion

The Civic Spring project had lofty goals, and its successes are evident in the transformative work of its six grantee groups and the multitude of civic learning that occurred. This project also revealed opportunities for improvement: future civic spaces must acknowledge, embrace, and then learn from the power dynamics and inherent, age-related inequity in intergenerational spaces, invest in sustainable community-building for the grantee cohort, and broaden conceptions of civic learning. Overall, Civic Spring demonstrated the vast promise of intergenerational spaces and communities of practice to both affect local communities and young people who are engaged in real-world civic work, and it provided a path forward for equitable civic spaces that fortify youth power.

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Appendix A: Technical Notes

In order to write the report, we analyzed multiple types of data from multiple sources. These data sources included: grantee final reports submitted to C&S; survey data from program participants across ages and roles (two waves of survey data); participant observation of the Community of Practice; and data from a structured roundtable discussion which was designed that we facilitated with participant advisory group input to gather feedback about the community of practice. We set out to study the Community of Practice in depth because of its innovative nature. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first evaluations of a community of practice connected to a youth-driven, multigenerational civic learning and action initiative.

Review of Grantee Reports

We reviewed all six grantee reports submitted to C&S: Groundwork Elizabeth, Institute of Engagement, Kinston Teens, Newark OneStop, the Kentucky Student Voice Team, and Minnesota Youth Champions. The grantee reports described the work completed, its impacts, and lessons learned.

Participant Survey

In addition to the qualitative data obtained through examination of the grantee final reports, the CIRCLE team conducted two surveys: one at the very end of the summer programs (September 2020; n=28) and one a few months later (December 2020-January 2021; n=30). When possible, we used existing, validated measures for constructs of interest; when no such measures existed, we created our own. A full list of the constructs measured, the definition of each construct, the items that are included in the construct, and references are available in Appendix B. The survey data were collected online, using Google Forms. The Institute for Citizens & Scholars managed the consent/assent process for participating in evaluation activities as part of their general grantee process. In addition, CIRCLE staff explained the goals of the study and fielded questions at Community of Practice meetings and also discussed the study and encouraged participation with each grantee.

For the validated measures of constructs, we calculated summary scores based on the creators' guidance. For ease of interpretation, we rescaled all scores to range from 0 to 10. For all scores, 10 represents the full or best score for that scale and 0 represents the lowest possible score.

We reported on the analyses in two ways: first, we provided descriptive statistics on the scales. In this case, we provided the medians of the construct scores. In this context, median is the score of a person whose score is exactly in the middle – the same number of people score above and below this person. We chose median over mean since the data were not necessarily normally distributed. Second, we assessed if there were any differences in the construct scores between the two survey waves using independent samples t-tests. However, we were statistically underpowered to detect statistical significance given the small sample size. We did not have identifiable participant data, so we were not able to assess within-person changes over time.

Community of Practice Data

Several sources of data were used for the evaluation of the Community of Practice (CoP). First, CIRCLE team members attended, observed, and took notes on the six CoP meetings, and participated in additional meetings with CoP facilitators. Second, we developed an “exit ticket” survey of 10-12 questions on Google Forms that participants were asked to fill out at the end of meetings. Third, we created a Youth Advisory Group composed of youth members of the CoP (who were paid for their time) to advise CIRCLE in identifying key themes and lessons from the CoP that then informed the development of focus group and interview protocols. We held one focus group on Zoom with 13 CoP participants attending and involved four breakout sessions facilitated by CIRCLE staff; other CIRCLE staff participated as notetakers. We also interviewed C&S staff and CoP facilitators ($n = 4$) about their role and perspective in the development and execution of the CoP. Lastly, we also had regular internal discussions among the CIRCLE team to discuss themes and takeaways at all stages of the evaluation process.

Appendix B: Survey Measures

Construct name	Construct description	Construct items	Source
Civic duty	“The desire and mindset to make positive contributions to society” (Bobek et al., 2009)	<p>How much do you agree or disagree with the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's not really my problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help. - I often think about doing things so that people in the future can have things better. - It is important to me to contribute to my community and society. - I believe I can make a difference in my community. 	Items taken from Active and Engaged Citizenship scale (Bobek et al., 2009)
Civic skills	Ability to take participatory actions in civic life and democracy	<p>If you found out about a problem in your community that you wanted to do something about (for example, illegal drugs were being sold near a school, or high levels of lead were discovered in the local drinking water), how well do you think you would be able to do each of the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact a newspaper, radio, or TV talk show to express your opinion on an issue. - Contact an elected official about the problem. - Contact or visit someone in government who represents your community. - Write an opinion letter to a local newspaper. (only in September survey) - Sign an online or written petition. - Express your views in front of a group of people. - Raise awareness among people in my community using social media - Start my own campaign about the issue - Organize a protest or march 	Items taken from Active and Engaged Citizenship scale (Bobek et al., 2009)
Participatory civic skills	Skills for taking action about a community problem of importance	<p>Below is a list of skills. Rate how well you can do each skill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a plan to address a problem. - Get other people to care about a problem. - Express my views to others in-person or in writing. 	Scale from Participation Skills subscale from the Youth Civic and Character Toolkit (Syversen et al., 2015)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen to conflicting viewpoints and identify where they agree and disagree. - Contact someone in a leadership position about a problem. - Summarize what another person said to make sure I understood 	
Critical consciousness	Perception of the presence of injustice and systemic oppression in America, particularly in government and politics	<p>How much do you agree or disagree with the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In America, some groups do not have equal chances to participate in government. - In America, political leaders only listen to the opinions of certain groups. - In America, certain groups have fewer chances to get ahead. 	Scale from Critical Consciousness subscale from the Youth Civic and Character Toolkit (Syversen et al., 2015)
Personal responsibility	Sense of personal duty to follow through or be accountable for one's words and actions	<p>How much are the following like you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If I do something wrong, I take responsibility for my actions. - When I say I'm going to do something, I do it - I am responsible 	Scale from Personal Responsibility subscale from the Youth Civic and Character Toolkit (Syversen et al., 2015)
Political participation	Engagement in community- and issue-based civic activity	<p>Have you ever done or planned to do the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend community meetings about an issue that affects people where I live. - Volunteer to campaign for a political candidate. - Contact politicians, governments, or authorities about issues that are important to me. - Participate in a rally or protest for a cause. 	Scale from Political Engagement subscale from the Youth Civic and Character Toolkit (Syversen et al., 2015)
Mental health and emotional well-being	Mental health as measured through emotional, social, and psychological well-being	<p>The following questions are about how you have been feeling during the past month. Select the option that best represents how often you have experienced or felt the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - happy - interested in life - satisfied with life (only in September survey) - that you had something important to contribute to society - that you belonged to a community (like a social group, your school, or your neighborhood) - that our society is a good place, or 	Items taken from Mental Health Continuum Short Form (Keyes, 2009; Keyes, 2006)

		<p>is becoming a better place, for all people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that people are basically good - that the way our society works made sense to you - that you liked most parts of your personality (only in September survey) - good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life - that you had warm and trusting relationships with others - that you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person - confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions - that your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it 	
Allyship	<p>Supporting young people both by uplifting their voices and sharing one's own skills, resources, and privilege.</p> <p>Answered by both youth and adult participants to reflect the many roles that youth take on in youth-led civic organizations</p>	<p>How would you assess your own present level in the following ways of working with young people and/or other young people? (select one option)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Truly respecting their ideas - Giving encouragement - Providing resources for activities - Listening carefully - Promoting active participation - Dealing with bureaucracies - Building community support - Helping them get organized - Encouraging critical thinking 	Scale from Adults as Allies Self-Assessment (Checkoway, 1996)
Community action and organizing skills		<p>Below is a list of political actions that people can take. Please consider in-person and virtual/online engagement when thinking about these activities.</p> <p>For each of them, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or would never under any circumstances do it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped register others to vote - Vote in a national, state, or local election - Tried to convince others to vote - Volunteered or worked for a political campaign - Organized with a community group or an issue advocacy group - Help make your city or town a better place for people to live - Help friends or family get through tough times. 	Items taken from national COVID-19 study (Cohen et al, 2020)

		<p>Below is a list of actions that people can take. For each of them, please indicate whether you have done any of these things over the past 6 months, whether you do it, do it sometimes, or don't do it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wear a mask in areas where I'll be around other people - Buy something for or deliver food to those in my neighborhood - Translate health materials or resource for family or neighbors - Try to convey accurate information about COVID-19 to peers and family 	
Civic and personal growth	Experiences during and outcomes from the Civic Spring project highlighting expansion of civic and life skills	<p>For each of the following please indicate how much you agree with the statement. Through my involvement in the Civic Spring Project (community actions, youth programs and Community of Practice meetings), I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learned to work through disagreements even when it's uncomfortable - Have become better at listening to someone whose perspectives are different than mine - Gained important life skills like taking care of mental health - Pushed myself to do something that was hard for me - I did something really well or something that seemed impossible - Learned how government, politics, or city procedures work - Became more connected to my community - Found or strengthened my own voice - Learned how I can use my voice to make my community more fair 	
Sense of community	Factors contributing to a perception of a cohesive and supportive community, including "membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection" (Chavis et al., 2008)	<p>How well does each of the following statements represent how you feel about your community (neighborhood, town, or city) today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My community helps me fulfill my needs. - I feel like a member of my community. - I have a good bond with others in my community. - I feel connected to my community. 	Items taken from Sense of Community Index (Chavis et al., 2008)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can get what I need in my community. - I have a say about what goes on in my community. - People in my community are good at influencing each other. 	
Civic responsibility	Sense of duty to help and speak up for those in need	<p>How important is each of the following to you in your life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helping to reduce hunger and poverty in the world. - Helping other people. - Speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights and opportunities) 	Items taken from Active and Engaged Citizenship scale (Bobek et al., 2009)
Skill retention (December survey only)	Opportunities for application and extension of skills after completion of Civic Spring project	<p>For each of the following, please indicate how much you agree with the statement. This fall, I have had opportunities to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have a conversation with someone who holds a different view from me - Pushed myself to do something that was hard for me - Do something really well - Used my voice in my community - Used knowledge of how government, politics, or city procedures work - Be engaged with my community - Help others - Take care of myself and my mental health 	

CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

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