



The Cleveland Youth Council: Using Civic Engagement as a Tool for Youth Empowerment

How a national initiative by
the W.K. Kellogg
Foundation works in the
Mississippi Delta

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Youth Innovation Fund

- National initiative to promote youth empowerment through civic engagement
- Eight sites include Chicago, IL; Portland, ME; Portland, OR; Nashville, TN; Ypsilanti, MI; Hampton, VA; San Francisco, CA; and Cleveland, MS (The Cleveland Youth Council)
- Cleveland is the smallest (half the size of the next smallest) and only rural site

What is Youth Civic Engagement?

- The W.K. Kellogg Youth Innovation Fund defines youth civic engagement as young people acting as key planners and decision-makers, addressing public issues, problems and concerns.

Components of Youth Civic Engagement

- Community Awareness and Context
- Youth/Adult Partnerships
- Youth Voice

Community Awareness/Context

- Issue mapping, Power analysis
 - Focus groups
 - Surveys
 - Group discussions
- Travel to other sites
 - Observation
 - Discussions
 - Written reflections



Community Awareness cont.

- “I have learned that Cleveland has its problems but it isn’t alone. All cities have their problems and Cleveland’s [are] just unique to Cleveland. Coming to Michigan has helped me see that even though Cleveland is a small city we can make a difference, [even] if only Cleveland residents see the benefits.”
- “What I have really enjoyed the most is the impact other sites said we have had on them. I think it’s so cool that a little town in Mississippi could influence a city that is over five times the size of Cleveland. It just goes to show that other councils watch our actions, even when we don’t know they are watching.”

Youth/Adult Partnerships

- Consortium of Adult Allies
 - Key stakeholders
 - Organizations committed to youth
- Adult board members
 - Contribute expertise
- Site Coordinator
 - Mentor and ally for youth
 - Bridge between youth and adults



Youth/Adult Partnerships cont.

- “Even though we know adults say they are listening, it’s always good to see them listening.”
- “We want to listen and understand and talk *with* [adults].”
- “[The Practitioners’ Conference on Civic Education] was a very good experience. It’s good how people can come together and have a conference about how to make our world a better place. I enjoy this and the fact that adults want to put an effort in helping us get our voices out.”

Youth Voice

- Youth feeling comfortable expressing ideas and opinions
- Adults listening to and taking youth seriously
- Inclusion, not tokenism



Youth Voice cont.

- “I think youth voice is a powerful thing. Youth have a different perspective on the world.”
- “[We need youth voice] to have a diverse opinion, a wider expansion of everybody’s thoughts and opinions to come out to one solution. We’re a part of the community.”
- “I want to make sure [youth on boards and committees are] actually heard.”

Youth Civic Engagement in Cleveland, MS

- Get on Board: Seeking Support for a Skate Park in Cleveland
- P.E.E.R.S. (People Encouraging Everyone to do the Right Stuff)
- Chamber of Commerce Committees Youth Members
- Superintendent's and Principals' Youth Advisory Councils
- What It Is?!? Youth Newsletter

Empowerment Through Civic Engagement

- “I don’t think many kids really know what they could do...a lot of people could bring a lot of different stuff to the table.”
- “We can take over as teenagers and make this world a better place.”
- “[We] can make changes. It’s basically knowing who to talk to and build partnerships with.”
- “We need to show that we care about what the youth are doing in our community. You don’t have to be a certain age to make a difference.”
- “Be the leaders of tomorrow today!”

Empowered Young People😊

