THE CO-CREATION GENERATION:

The Story of the Kentucky Student Voice Team & Guide to Intergenerational Impact

a partnership between

INSTITUTE FOR CITIZENS & SCHOLARS

Kentucky Student Voice Team

INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENS &
SCHOLARS™

The Institute for Citizens & Scholars (formerly the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation) is a 75-year-old organization that has played a significant role in shaping American higher education. Now, with an expanded mission, Citizens & Scholars prepares leaders and engages networks of people and organizations to meet urgent education challenges. The overarching goal is to shape an informed, productively engaged, and hopeful citizenry.

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For more information and resources, visit our website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, TOOLKIT, & RESOURCE GUIDE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for Citizens & Scholars (C&S) is fundamentally rethinking how young people prepare to be productive lifelong citizens. A critical element of this work is engaging youth at the intersection of community and civic life. C&S' work has proven that significant civic learning takes place in after-school programs, on the sports field, at summer camp, in community service groups, and—of course—at home.

There is a unique opportunity to leverage the out-of-school space to help young people cultivate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

Between June – October 2020, C&S partnered with, supported, and engaged young people across the country on issues that impacted their lives and their communities, including education policy, public health, social reforms, and the environment. C&S awarded grants to six youth-led and youth-centered organizations through an initiative named the Civic Spring Project. A key finding of the project was the lack of resources for those interested in building and sustaining meaningful youth-led and intergenerational initiatives.

To address that knowledge gap, C&S asked the youth grantees from the Kentucky Student Voice Team (KSVT) to produce a lesson- and resource-rich study that can be used by youth and adults in the out-of-school-time (OST) field.

The goal of this co-designed report is to provide a toolkit, organizational history and narrative, and a research framework that:

- Helps OST programs build capacity and support for creating projects of youth, for youth, by youth.

- Begins to develop common standards of practice and measurement tools for civic learning, particularly for OST programs and youth organizing

- Inspires practitioners, youth leaders and any others interested in using these tools and standards in their own work to establish an analytic program model[1] for youth-led, youth-created, and intergenerational initiatives

C&S believes that if organizations learn from and engage with the narrative, lessons, and recommendations outlined in this case study, adult providers will benefit from more active youth engagement and retention in their programs. In fact, the proof is in this product—while working on the study C&S and the Kentucky Student Voice Team modeled their partnership on the approaches and principles outlined below and found that the process greatly benefited all involved. This framework creates opportunities for adults and young people to engage in co-designing and co-managing projects that develop the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to strengthen our democracy.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

For Adults:

The document is intended to be used by adults—including those working in community-based organizations, community-wide initiatives, outreach, and government-led intiatives—who are interested in creating or strenthening an intergenerational organizational model and/or developing youth-led and youth-centered programming.

For Youth:

This document is intended to be used by youth who are developing their own set of initiatives, and/or who want to engage adults in civic spaces and are seeking good practices for building, sustaining, and evaluating intergenerational or youth-led models.

CIVIC SPRING PROJECT

C&S capitalized on the summer availability of the KSVT members—all of whom are high school or college students—to reflect on the evolution of the organization as a model for youth-led intergenerational management and achievement. The hope is that by late fall 2021, as the COVID-19 landscape continues to shift and additional funding under the American Rescue Plan Act becomes available, both youth-led and adult-led OST organizations will be better positioned to use these resources to inform and support their upcoming work. In addition, C&S is preparing to launch a second Civic Spring Project in early 2022; these practices and models will inform how the program is structured and how we better engage with and support youth-led and intergenerational organizations.

10 PRINCIPLES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL SUCCESS

1

Practice active and inclusive youth engagement.

All organizations can mobilize youth and keep them actively engaged, but it takes resources and energy to incorporate diverse voices and perspectives. Communication structures must shift, trust must be built, and mindsets may need to change. Flexibility is key.

Expand engagement opportunities so that they can be accessed by a variety of youth and adults. Recognize that each person's needs and motivations are different.

Consider going mostly or fully virtual. Operating in digital spaces allows the team to build and sustain relationships and accommodate students from across the state who face transportation and other accessibility barriers.

More from KSVT: *See communications & meetings section in Key Things to Know About the KSVT.*

2

Make intergenerational work the end-goal.

Adults must be willing to learn from youth, and youth must be willing to learn from adults. Together, intergenerational work can drive greater impact.

Find ways to celebrate intergenerational learning wherever possible.

Combine the experiences and wisdom of youth and adults to create a stronger organization.

More from KSVT: *Model organizational structure on Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's participation*

3

Evolve your mission and organizational structure.

When youth help design the core elements of an organization (including mission, vision, and values) they are part of creating the culture.

Take the time to develop a mission that everyone—including youth—believes in and wants to be a part of, and then build a culture around that mission. Involve young people in the design of operations and programming, including conceptualization, prototyping, implementation, and refinement of the work at every turn.

More from KSVT: *The organizational structure for KSVT created a membership that is self-selected, meaning there is no application, academic or professional requirement, or dues. Since there is such a low-barrier point-of-entry, young people get to engage first and then choose how to increase their capacities and confidence and build leadership skills. This allows the organizational structure to be fluid enough to plug new members in where they are most comfortable or interested, and then let them dictate where they will be most of use.*

4

Be prepared to do *a lot* of "unlearning".

Too often young people are taught that they don't have the power or authority to contribute to civic spaces. Likewise, many adults undervalue or ignore the value of youth in program design, policy, management, communications and work product, etc.[2]

Youth-led does not necessarily mean youth *only*. Use the social capital of adults without replicating frameworks that overvalue adults and undervalue youth.

Create a balanced youth/adult dynamic: adults should not wield all the power, nor should they cede all the power. There is a middle path.

More from KSVT: *Read this SAGE study for key ways that adults can be youth allies.*

5

Challenge preconceived notions of age groups.

Youth and adult perceptions of the other can be a significant barrier to intergenerational work. Youth can believe that adults are out of touch, and adults can believe that youth are inexperienced and incapable of meaningful participation. Of course, neither of these is necessarily true.

Share firsthand experiences of the social, political, or cultural issues both adults and youth face.

Work together to design solutions to the problems that directly affect your community.

6

Look for tension in your language.

Leadership roles are more fluid when organizations focus less on titles and more on collective decision making. This is especially important when working with youth whose obligations and responsibilities fluctuate drastically. Adult allies who have more agency over their daily lives can help ensure steady work flows.

Consider abandoning or de-emphasizing traditional titles. Doing so shifts the focus away from overvaluing individualism and creates more space to prioritize the interest of the group.

Examine how language used within and beyond the organization shapes youth involvement *and* how shifting that language can diversify who gets to do the work.

More from KSVT: See structure section in *Key Things to Know About the KSVT*.

7

Examine the hesitation to bring youth into leadership and decision-making.

Part of this work is making a shift toward meaningfully integrating youth voices both internally and out in the world.

Avoid the pitfall of "gradual change" which too often causes the work to stop short of integrating youth as full members in the decision-making process.

Demonstrate the value of intergenerational partnerships by having youth engage with the community through external-facing activities such as presenting on behalf of the organization, authoring articles and op-eds, serving as a spokesperson, attending meetings with funders, and so on.

More from KSVT: *Joint op-ed Courier Journal article:* "Prichard Committee's Student Voice Team 'does democracy'"

8

Communicate across platforms.

Transparency is vital to trust-building and organizational impact.

Find a platform that allows all participants to engage with each other.

Acknowledge that harm is perpetuated when people don't have a platform to share their beliefs. Providing broad access to information-sharing and engagement is an effective way to help build open communication and flatten organizational hierarchies.

More from KSVT: *The KSVT uses Slack, a virtual communication platform, which enables members to directly message each other, create group channels for projects they are involved in, and react to messages to signify that they've read them.*

9

Assess, reflect, and improve!

Adults must be willing to learn from youth, and youth must be willing to learn from adults. Together, intergenerational work can drive greater impact.

Ensure that youth are part of the conceptualization, design, implementation, and analysis.

Establish a mission and a vision, and identify short- and long-term goals, such as growth in membership, number of new projects, or number and diversity of youth involved.

Choose how to monitor and evaluate your work, such as through a baseline and final survey.

More from KSVT: *KSVT Jamboard SWOT Analysis*

10

Adopt a growth mindset.

Nothing is permanent. There is always room to reflect, change and grow. Just because an organization was founded on certain principles or held certain beliefs does not mean that they are unchangeable. It takes continued work and effort to sustain meaningful change.

Embed flexibility in a variety of ways to maximize growth potential.

Develop cultural norms of group reflection that allow members to continuously reflect and learn together.

More from KSVT: *KSVT uses internal meetings as a place to let members test new methods and strategies. This provides leadership development opportunities and helps to make meetings dynamic and responsive to the needs of the moment.*

KSVT INTERGENERATIONAL ASSESSMENT:
WHERE ARE YOU NOW
& WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

The following set of statements are intended to help entities measure progress in creating an intergenerational program or organization. The Kentucky Student Voice Team considers these seven points essential indicators that an organization is "youth-led". Use this assessment to begin a conversation and/or periodically assess achievements and goals in each priority area. If new to this work, consider starting this assessment with a team at the program or project level, with the ultiamte goal of integrating these progress indicators organizationally.

Rating Scale:

0: We have not yet considered putting this practice into place.
1: We are interested in incorporating this practice into our work but have no plans yet.
2: We plan to incorporate this practice into our work over the next 6 months.
3: We have just incorporated this practice into our work.
4: We have been doing this for the past 6 months or less.
5: We have been doing this for more than 6 months.

DATE: _____

_____ Young people are making impactful, fundamental decisions within the organization.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ The work is designed to uplift youth voices—especially underrepresented youth voices.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ The structure of the organization fosters coequal partnerships between young people and adults within the organization.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ There is constant growth and evolution within the walls of the organization in order to effectively serve young people.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ Communication is always a priority, whether it be an explanation of jargon, an end-of-year goal, or the coordination of projects.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ Transparency between members—especially between youth and adult members—is not only maintained, but *expected* within the organization.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

_____ Youth are compensated for their time, effort, and experience/expertise.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS	SHORT TERM GOAL/S 3–6 MONTHS	LONGER TERM GOAL/S 12-24 MONTHS

TOTAL: _____

SCORING

0–11 Your organization is just getting started—make it a priority to gather the members of your team and decide how best to put these elements into practice!

12–23 Your organization is on the road to having youth co-designing and co-leading the programmatic efforts—keep up the good work!

24–35 Your organization is in a strong position with youth in co-design and co-leadership roles alongside adults—make sure to monitor and evaluate your progress as you continue this journey!

KSVT KEY TERMS
INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AND FIELD-BUILDING

Analytic program model: characterizes the core elements of program design shared by all intergenerational learning. It is a model that connects broad program goals and desired outcomes to effective program offerings. Program designers can use it to translate their missions into functional programs. It is a useful tool for program administrators to determine which approach to intergenerational learning best meets their needs.[3]

Civic learning: a process through which a young person develops into a productive citizen in our democratic society, which includes gaining civic knowledge and capacities, and also practicing civic skills, encouraging civic dispositions.

Civic knowledge: an understanding of government structure, government processes, relevant social studies knowledge and concepts, and American history and political thought in a global context.

Civic skills: competencies in the use of one's voice, including basic writing, speaking, and listening skills and skills of research, investigation, and critical thinking; competencies in the use of practices of democratic coordination, political institutions, and media literacy.

Civic dispositions: attitudes important in a democracy, such as a sense of civic duty, sense of efficacy, concern for the welfare of others, and commitment to trustworthiness and bridge-building.[4]

Civic capacities: access to networks, opportunities to participate, and other forms of social capital that promote civic agency.[5]

Civic health: the civic, social, and political strength of a community.

Civic strength: characterized by the level of individual engagement and the community's capacity to work together to resolve collective problems (specific indicators of this include volunteerism and service, group participation, charitable giving, and collective action).[6]

Civic virtue: describing the character of a good participant in a civil society (the personal qualities associated with the effective functioning of the civil and political order or the preservation of its values and principles).[7]

Co-design: a practice in which youth are directly involved in shaping an organization to epitomize the values and priorities of the team.

Co-leadership: placing youth alongside adults at the forefront of programmatic work (in this practice, adult allies actively help to build young people's agency and leadership capacities, while creating a space where all members are heard.)

Collectivist team culture: a culture where the voices of all members are equitably valued and equally respected, creating an inclusive and collaborative flat organization.

Community of Practice: a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (The "community" refers to a self-selected network of individuals who share a passion for learning more deeply about some aspect of their work. In a community of practice, participants come together to intentionally learn from and share practices and ideas with each other.)[89]

Intergenerational: the engagement of individuals from different generations or age categories in shared work/efforts.

Out-of-school time (OST): a broad field/space including national service learning, after-school and out-of-school programs which run programming for youth.

Productive citizen: an individual who is well-informed, productively engaged in working for the common good and hopeful about our democracy.

Tokenism: the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality within a workforce.

Youth-centered: young people are the audience of focus and engaged as participants but not necessarily part of the team driving decision-making.

Youth-driven: young people's voices and perspectives help shape decisions.

Youth-led: young people lead the design, testing, implementation, evaluation, and refinement process, with support from adult allies as needed or requested.

THE STORY OF THE KENTUCKY STUDENT VOICE TEAM

I. INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Student Voice Team supports students as research, policy, and advocacy partners in order to co-create more just and democratic Kentucky schools and communities. Comprising approximately 100 self-selected students from throughout the state, the KSVT targets an intergenerational audience at the grassroots (school and district levels) as well as the grass tops (policy and legislation). The team conducts roundtables, interviews, and quantitative research that harness, amplify, and elevate the voices and experiences of young people who represent the diversity of the state, and shares them across a range of platforms to inform public conversations about education. The team runs a podcast and blog; designs and delivers professional development for students, educators, and policy influencers; mobilizes intergenerational coalitions around issues and legislative initiatives; generates policy reports, social media, public testimony,

and op-eds; and facilitates and normalizes dialogue between young people and other education stakeholders and decision-makers.

But getting to this point has taken years' worth of learning, unlearning, and relearning—reckoning with the ways in which "youth-led" spaces to mobilize young people rarely existed inside the classroom. The team was committed to drawing on the power of young people one step at a time, developing a democratic internal process that reflected and produced democratic outputs. This case study details that process.

NOTE: ANY TEXT HIGHLIGHTED REFERS TO A LINKED RESOURCE IN THE APPENDIX.

II. BACKGROUND & TIMELINE

2012 to 2013: Think Tank Year—No Formalized Structure

There was no formal structure or funding during the year of the team's conception. Students who responded to a flyer posted outside several Central Kentucky high school guidance offices spent an academic year engaged in casual conversations. The sessions were loosely structured by adult volunteers who worked for or with the Prichard Committee, a statewide nonprofit committed to mobilizing citizens to improve Kentucky schools. The primary adult initiator was a volunteer who had extensive experience in youth activism and development and a conviction that as primary stakeholders, students were an essential missing piece in the Committee's efforts.

The Team focused broadly on exploring the merits and nature of student voice and considered the unique value-add students could bring to existing school improvement efforts in the state. Several months in, the group then specifically charged itself with conducting research and interviewing other students about the education issues that concerned them. The group finally requested 20 minutes for a presentation at the Prichard Committee's annual meeting to make the case for students as partners in their work going forward. The result was a floor
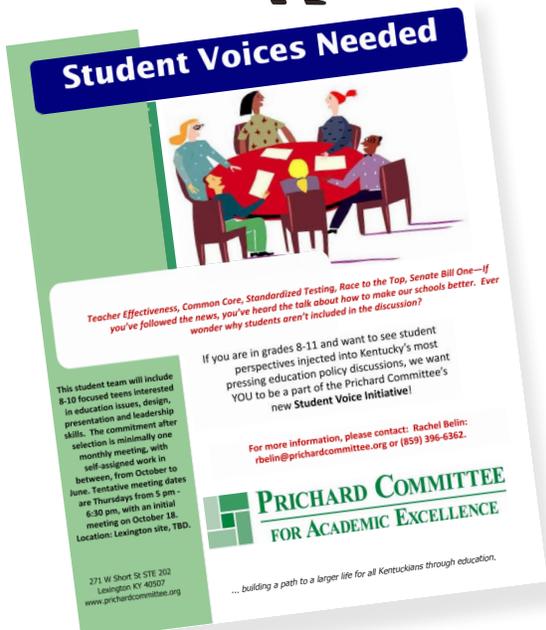
vote to approve the students' proposal to institutionalize their experiment in the form of an official pilot program, and the "Prichard Committee Student Voice Team" was named and launched.

2013 to 2014: Pilot Year—Start of Executive Leadership Circle

Designating a pilot to reflect the experimental mindset and the continued lack of funding, the first full programming year also reflected the Team's desire to build social capital and credibility within the parent organization and integrate students into existing work. Since students themselves had to make the initial case for their value, there was a sense that they had moved a "Trojan Horse" into the more established organization and had an unusual, if fleeting, opportunity to show what they could do as partners in education improvement efforts.

The relatively rigid structure the Team created to govern themselves reflected the students' new and uncertain status as a part of the larger organization. The group created a three-month project rotation structure that focused on a number of issues, half of which were also prioritized by the parent organization. They also established an "Adult Brain Trust," a network of adult allies, including attorneys, academics, and activists, who had professional and social status, a special understanding of the value of youth voice, and the interest and willingness to vouch for the Student Voice Team if necessary.

The structure was exactly what helped the Team improvise and respond to opportunities as they arose. An early success came when the group considered the value-add of students in a campaign the parent organization was running to increase public awareness about inadequate school funding. The KSVT turned the Prichard Committee's "Our Kids Can't Wait" slogan into a first-person mantra. Students turned up at public rallies holding signs that read "*We* Can't Wait " and mobilized other young people on social media to share their own stories and images of inadequate school funding. As several students stood on a stage holding "textbooks that are older than we are " one student shared the stories they had collected in a high-profile summit convened by the parent organization. The moment was a watershed in the promise of youth and adult partnership as students succeeded in shaping the narrative and the next day's headlines.

A few months into the pilot year, the Team realized there was a need to have more regular conversation and activities between monthly meetings. They proposed the creation of an executive committee to help manage emerging categories of work involving blog and op-ed writing, policy issue research,

2013– 2014

kystuvoiceteam
Lexington, KY

♡ ▢ ◁

November 2, 2013

KST: Students hold old textbooks during SVT's presentation to the Adequate Funding Summit

kystuvoiceteam
Lexington, KY

♡ ▢ ◁

February 14, 2014

KST: Students speak at rally for education funding at a local middle school.

external engagement, and social media and marketing. The committee would come to be known as the Executive Leadership Circle, and its creation would give the team some added structure and stability, even as students figured out in team meetings where they wanted to focus their energy in the education policy space.

In February 2013, the group began to question their hierarchical structure. They revisited the question of titles and more formalized structures. Though their high schools and the traditional college admission process demanded titles as a form of currency for recognition and advancement, they very consciously decided against them. "I think our commitment and involvement is passion-driven. Titles can be the only tokenized entity on KSVT as I believe those of us that are greatly involved and that would gun for titles in the first place would not care for specific ones as long as we feel valued," a member of the Executive Leadership Circle wrote in an argument that ultimately prevailed.

2014–2015

kystuvoiceteam
Kentucky State Capitol

February 24, 2015

KST: SVT testifies at House Education Committee about superintendent bill with additional students supporting from the gallery.

2014 to 2015: Initial Committee Model

Entering Year 3, the KSVT model continued much as it had the year before, with a dedicated executive leadership meeting in between the general monthly meetings. The KSVT was forced to evolve, however, as it started expanding the scope of its work from promoting the general idea of student voice to targeting ways to implement student voice in education policy making.

The group was beginning to see that amplifying student voice to frame public education narratives through opinion pieces like this was a cheap, powerful way to build on existing resources and leverage the unique and relevant perspectives students could bring to conversations about education policy. That same year, the Team produced 15 more opinion pieces that were carried in statewide newspapers targeting intergenerational audiences and reaching over a million Kentucky readers in the process.

Two events precipitated the change to a more formal structure. First, the KSVT had focused its Summer 2014 work on investigating why so many students were struggling to make the transition to college, an effort known as the "Postsecondary Project." This project was the first to be funded by an external foundation, and the work continued into the school year as the team produced a final report. Second, the resignation of the Superintendent of Fayette County Public Schools in Lexington gave the Team an opportunity to push for student involvement in hiring his replacement. This effort began in late November 2014 and would quickly expand to include a full legislative campaign when the Team discovered students were excluded from participating

kystuvoiceteam
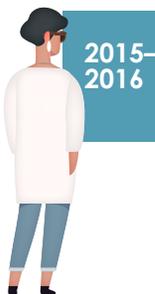Rachel Maddow Show

June 6, 2015

KST: Rachel Maddow Show segment and interview about SVT campaign and rally.

kystuvoiceteam
Clark County, KY

May 15, 2015

KST: SVT conducts school climate audit, talking with students at a middle school

2015–2016

2016–2018

by the law governing the process. The Team drafted House Bill 236 and enlisted a legislative sponsor to amend the law.

The demands of these two projects prompted the Team to specialize further. In December, they designed five committees. Three would be issue- and project-focused: Common Core, investigating the success of the new standards in Kentucky as many politicians and leaders debated them; School Governance, leading the charge on HB 236 and related research; and Postsecondary, to continue the work of the summer project and promote what would become the College Tripwires report. Two additional committees would handle cross-cutting duties: Communications, managing social media and press relations, and State and External Affairs, focusing on legislative issues, including lobbying in Frankfort for HB 236. Each committee would have a chair or co-chairs, and the Executive Leadership Circle evolved into the Executive Committee to coordinate the work of the five other committees. Over the course of the next few months, some students who had been involved with the Team all three years and were in their first years of college started leading much of the work of the Executive Committee, and their roles evolved into Student Director and Associate Student Director.

This became the general model for the KSVT's structure during the next few years and fueled some prolific outputs, as framed in a joint op-ed, notably co-authored by the youth and adult co-directors.

2015 to 2016: Expanded Committee Model

Among the Year 4 organizational innovations were an expanded list of roles, including one dedicated to ensuring more equity; attention to regional representation; and the introduction of study groups as a means for the group to vet new issue priorities. That year also saw the launch of the Team's first student-led "Student Voice School Climate Audit," an effort that would continue to evolve, position the group as qualified experts on school climate and culture, and mark the first of many more youth-led, participatory action research projects.

2016 to 2018: Refined Committee Model

By Year 5, the Team began to more consciously move away from the organizational structure modeled by the parent organization. The "executive committee" was replaced with a "leadership circle" to oversee the defined work and allow for more

October 17, 2017

KST: SVT members hold up *Ready Or Not: Stories from the Students Behind the Statistics,* after releasing the book at a postsecondary policy symposium in Frankfort

2018–2020

March 20, 2018

KST: Students and supporters discuss school safety at SVT-led Teach-In at the Capitol Annex.

self-selected participation. The more fluid and democratic model seemed to work as the next two years saw a burst of activity at the grassroots and grasstops levels alike. Major accomplishments included the release of the *Students as Partners Policy Report* and statewide listening tour to share original research about the role of Kentucky students in formal school decision-making bodies; the publication of *Ready or Not,* a book which featured survey data and stories from hundreds of Kentucky students struggling to transition to college; the launch of the Student Voice Forum, an independent blog; and the creation of the Powerball Promise Campaign, which lifted the stories and statistics the team had collected from students to pressure the legislature to ultimately restore $14 million dollars that had been diverted from the state lottery to support need-based college scholarships for 8,000 additional Kentucky youth.

2018 to 2020: Mobilization Circle

As the KSVT entered Years 6 and 7, the organizational structure began to reflect a deepening collaborative culture. Inspired by the Providence Student Union, the Team adapted a model as seen in their 2018 Activation Levels Chart to capture, explain, and allow for members to move in and out of activism levels throughout the school year and recognize the important role that even seemingly dormant youth and adult allies could play in building a constituency around the work. The year also produced one of the most unusual organizational flow charts yet: a planetary model that playfully conveyed just how many different projects were naturally emerging, how many different people were helping to coordinate them, and how they were connected to each other and supported by adult allies.

The visuals reflected yet another period of prolific outputs and the Team's ability to respond rapidly to external developments. This ability was most notably deployed in the wake of a school shooting in Marshall County, Kentucky, which claimed the lives of three high school students there and preceded the Parkland, Florida shooting by just a few weeks. As schools began lockdown drills and legislators began to clamor for a firm response to the violence, the KSVT articulated a counter narrative, based on the research they had conducted about school climate and culture, as well as their continued school climate audits involving thousands of high school students from geographically diverse schools that year. Sharing their expertise first in a series of op-eds, (including one from March 2018 ahead of a statewide teach-in and outdoor rally they organized in the Capital, and then as testimony before state and federal legislative commissions) members advocated for solutions that included more attention to "softening" schools with more mental health and social and emotional supports rather than "hardening" them with more school resource

officers, armed teachers, and metal detectors. The Team received widespread coverage from Kentucky news outlets, and their language and emphasis on mental health appeared in Senate Bill One, the School Safety and Resiliency Act, which passed with strong bipartisan support and with an amended nod to the Team that stipulated students must be part of the development of school safety plans going forward.

2020 to 2021: The Core Team

As COVID-19 gripped Kentucky and the rest of the country, Year 8 offered proof that the KSVT's internal structure—one that was led by a deep bench of multiple youth mobilizers, one that valued youth initiative and agency, and one that could count on intergenerational support—was also perfectly positioned to ensure the Team could mobilize to meet the moment.

That moment arrived when Kentucky schools shut down for the pandemic in Spring 2020. Despite uncertainty about student learning under these difficult conditions, the KSVT hit its programmatic stride. Members readily transitioned to the all-virtual environment and, given the additional time that came with learning from home, were able to remain connected and lean into the work more consistently than ever.

At the time, six high school juniors and one college undergraduate—some of whom had been active with the Team since middle school and all of whom had devoted the majority of their high school careers to it—sprang into action. Sensing that the found time during the pandemic afforded them an opportunity to develop new and younger leaders in the group, grant more attention to internal climate and more collaborative work, and ensure a smooth succession when most of them would graduate the next spring, they designed yet another structure they called the Core Team.

Members of the Core 7 met regularly in both youth-only and intergenerational space, as they deemed appropriate. Having honed some specialized skills around the KSVT's research, podcast, blog, legislative efforts, and school climate work, and having charged themselves with creating opportunities for students to collaborate across the organization, they took it upon themselves to figure out ways to develop and support emerging leaders to replace them.

Among the results was the seminal Coping with COVID Student-to-Student Study. With support and guidance from the "Research Advisory Dream Team," adult experts from the University of Kentucky and other institutions the KSVT had cobbled together over the years to assist with their research,

kystuvoiceteam
Zoom

August 6, 2020

KST: SVT presents COVID study findings.

2020–2021

students designed a survey that adapted their school climate audits to gauge how Kentucky middle and high school students were managing learning from home. Educators, administrators, non-profit leaders, and other adults and youth in their extensive network assisted with the dissemination, and the results defied even the seasoned researchers' expectations. Nearly 10,000 students from 119 of Kentucky's 120 counties responded, offering a fount of real-time data about what students were experiencing and needing as Kentucky continued to navigate school decision-making during the pandemic.

Work on the Coping with COVID Student-to-Student Survey would only deepen in the coming months as the intergenerational research team felt a responsibility to share the student voices they had gathered with education decision-makers to inform public conversations. In response to news that a number of funders were looking to invest in youth-driven strategies to address the pandemic, the adult director enlisted the team to help develop a series of development proposals to take the research to the next level. A $100,000 award from the Institute for Citizens & Scholars in early July 2020, in addition to a number of smaller grants from national funders, allowed the team to do just that.

The unusual funding supported the KSVT's operating expenses, further allowed it to compensate both adult research experts and the nearly two dozen students leading the work, and signaled that the program had gained some serious traction and credibility in student-led education research. The Team applied for and received retroactive approval from the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board for the survey and launched a second phase that would also meet the IRB requirements for rigor and include qualitative interviews with students who were underrepresented in the survey results.

Even as the KSVT continues to conduct the longitudinal interviews, it can claim some measurable success in reaching the initiative's original goal: harnessing student voice to better inform Kentucky's education decision-making process through the pandemic. Since releasing their executive summary and a series of regional reports, the KSVT shared its findings in presentations more than thirty times with key local education thought leaders, including the state Board of Education, a state legislative review subcommittee, the school superintendents' association, a number of statewide parent leadership groups, and the Kentucky Department of Education. The group presented results and the research process behind it at the national level to organizations including the Aspen Institute, the National Center for School Climate, the World Affairs Institute, and the Policy Innovators in Education Network, among others. In addition, the research team wrote several local and national articles about the work, was featured in scores of local and national news stories themselves, and even submitted an article for a peer-reviewed academic journal.

2021 to 2022: Unicorns, Flowers, and the Move to Independence

Year 9 marked the complete transformation of KSVT's internal governance structure to a youth-led one as the Team spun off from its parent organization and established its own separate nonprofit. The move to independence in January 2021 was precipitated by continuing programmatic success, unprecedented and youth-generated investment, the full faith and support of adult allies, and the desire of young people leading the work to more fully realize their own agency as co-designers.

With support from the founding director and two founding members who had helped guide the organization since its inception and who were now in their mid-20s, and in preparation for the shift, the Team immediately put a number of provisions in place: They drafted a Memorandum of Understanding to protect their intellectual property and allow for the transfer of some of the funds they had raised; they found a fiscal sponsor to accept and help manage the funds as they worked through tax and other legal issues; they enlisted an attorney to guide them through the filing process for 501(c)(3) status; they communicated the story of their independence through direct conversations with their funders and longtime allies and through a rebranding campaign; they developed bylaws and a minimalist board; and they once again reorganized their internal leadership structure to reflect more practically the collectivist culture to which they had previously aspired.

The KSVT named their new governance model "unicorns." It was meant to include not only the core team and the emerging leaders the core team had identified to replace them, but also, and crucially, any other member who wanted to take part in strategic decisions going forward. In this way, the unicorns (a name chosen to represent the unusual nature of a collaborative culture that didn't obsess about hierarchical roles) were meant to be as self-selective as the other components of the organization. The expansive group met regularly to talk through programmatic and operational issues with adult advisors, and a number of new initiatives began to emerge. By the end of the summer, just as most of the core team prepared to begin their new lives as college students and a new crop of students were awaiting orientation, the unicorns began to add some definition to their roles as depicted in one of their most creative organizational graphics yet: The Flower Flow Chart.

The ability to make faster decisions that came with their newfound independence and internal reorganization translated into prolific programmatic outputs at both the legislative and school levels.

At the grasstops, 2021 saw the #SaveOurSeats Campaign, the KSVT's rapid response to the threat legislators posed when they introduced an amendment that would remove the non-voting student and teacher representatives from the Kentucky Board of Education. Within hours of being alerted by adult allies that a Senate subcommittee would try to adopt the change the next morning, the Team

created a virtual war room and went to work through the night. By early morning, the KSVT had developed a full-blown media campaign and were ready to deploy.

As soon as the amendment to remove the student and teacher representatives from the Board of Education was introduced, a member broke the story in her high school's student newspaper. The Team then launched a petition to gather hundreds of signatures and testimonials from both adults and other young people, had quiet conversations with a number of legislators, ran an op-ed in newspapers across the state, and patched together a coalition with various teacher groups and other youth-led organizations they had been working with over the course of several years that brought widespread attention to the cause.

The substitution bill was ultimately removed by conference committee when the House overwhelmingly rejected the change, and the student and teacher seats were enshrined in law by the end of the session.

At the grassroots and in response to the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the Kentucky Student Voice Team expanded its student-led school climate audits and made several key innovations to further democratize the research process. Whereas the Team had previously led the audit process in person and included only those members who could find transportation to make it to the audit site, they transformed the training curriculum into a series of shorter, weekly coaching sessions. They then identified interested students and educators in four geographically diverse middle and high schools to recruit their own intergenerational research teams to meet regularly with the KSVT youth and adult facilitators, designing, conducting, and analyzing their own climate audits to share back with their school communities.

III. THE ROLE OF CO-DESIGN AND CO-LEADERSHIP

The KSVT's vision for an ideal Kentucky is one in which young people and other educational stakeholders and decision makers co-design a model for more just, democratic schools and communities. The KSVT pictures a future in which—through collaborative work and co-leading practices—all stakeholders can contribute their perspectives and expertise. Young people design and manage initiatives that engage others in developing and implementing goals and metrics, and no single person has total decision-making power over any major activity. Titles are granted as descriptors when they are necessary and often well after work has already begun, and they include an expectation that those in defined roles are centrally charged with supporting other young people to participate in the work. In this way, leadership is as self-selective as membership, with a note that extra support and encouragement to participate and take on defined roles are granted to those who need more of it.

The KSVT prides itself on its strong, impactful youth leadership; young people are at the helm of every layer of design and implementation—yet the organization is not exclusive to young people alone. Adult allies work alternately alongside or in less visible support of young people on everything from ad hoc projects and signature programs to organizational issues such as budgeting, development, membership outreach and external communications. In essence, adult allies help ensure that the KSVT is youth-led. By consciously ceding their own power to students, by providing guidance mainly when needed or requested, and by sharing connections, credibility, and social capital, adults serve as quieter but critical collaborators. And though only young people are thought of as "members" of the Kentucky Student Voice Team, adults are considered vital parts of the "Team".

CO-DESIGN
practice that sees young people shape the KSVT to epitomize the values and priorities of the team

CO-LED
placing young people at the forefront of the work with adult allies helping to build their agency and leadership capacity, while creating a space where all members are heard

IV. KSVT PRO-TIPS & IMPACT-READY RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Engage Youth in Every Aspect of the Work

Redefine "Youth-Led"

As an organization, much of the work of the Kentucky Student Voice Team centers around reimagining what "youth-led" looks like. Whereas in the KSVT, young people are themselves refining their vision, setting their priorities, and creating the strategies to accomplish their goals, young people and adults outside of the organization might point to classic school governance structures such as student councils as paragons of student-led programming. But such programs often operate under a structure created and monitored by adults and typically fail to engage young people in the type of work that drives more systemic impact. "Youth-led" does not mean "youth only," but it does require a conscious shift in the traditional youth/adult dynamic. And so, the challenge is real: that traditional intergenerational dynamic, one in which older people wield the most power to make meaningful decisions, is exactly what is preserved and privileged in a typical high school setting. Defining "youth-led" in this way allows young people in the KSVT to thoroughly elevate and amplify the voices of Kentucky students, as they lead and pioneer the work in an accessible and collaborative manner.

While young people make up the backbone of the KSVT's programming, much of it would not be possible without the allyship of adults operating in specific and nontraditional ways. A 2021 study of the effectiveness of adults in supporting youth driving education policy change by Holquist & Walls in SAGE Journal provides some evidence. Citing the KSVT as one of two state-based examples, the authors conclude that adults who are successful as allies in such youth-led work tend to follow three essential practices:

1. First, adults are able to provide scaffolding for students to model traditional adult roles like facilitation and interaction with other adults.

   - Successful adult allies choose to cede power when students request it or when students are ready.

2. These adults are able to assist students in overcoming learned or previous helplessness. They are conscious about helping students understand their own power.

3. Successful adult allies demonstrate an ability to help young people understand and navigate tokenism largely by creating spaces for young people to process their experiences and debrief.[10]

Sustain the Work

Just as young people themselves are changing at rapid rates, there is recognition that the KSVT must be able to embrace and accommodate that growth. For that reason, the culture provides room for members continuously to reflect and learn together, and it allows for participants to opt in and out of the work as it progresses and as they juggle competing demands.

Within the organization, particularly over the past year, growth has involved realizing the vision of more just and democratic schools and communities in Kentucky without replicating power imbalances. There is more intentionality around shifting power to those who, because of age, income, race, or other status may otherwise have less of it. And with such strategies as targeted project-based work, more widespread student compensation, and partnerships with adult community leaders, the KSVT is also investing more dedicated

energy in drawing more historically marginalized youth into its ranks and engaging with more urgency in issues of education justice.

Within the KSVT, participants are encouraged not only to co-design the work but also to improve it. Furthermore, though members may need to build consensus and enlist support for plans they would like to implement, they do not need to await permission to address issues as they arise. In this way and because so many people own the challenges of the KSVT, many people also serve as stewards for its long-term success.

Practice Co-Design

The KSVT offers a structure that ensures young people are responsive to a dynamic environment and prioritize student perspectives and needs. That is because within the KSVT, young people are co-designing all elements of operations and programming, a process that includes the practice of conceptualization, prototyping, implementation, and refinement of the work at every turn. It is precisely this co-design process that fosters the type of agency members need to include others with conviction and confidence.

When a student steps up from general membership to a more defined role, typically one that involves mobilizing others around a specific initiative, they are tasked with developing a subculture and community around it that shares their decision-making power and allows for others to exercise agency too. Project and program leads recruit others to their teams, create and facilitate a dedicated Slack channel for reliable communication, determine the balance between synchronous and asynchronous activities, and then work with their own teams to build relationships, develop goals, and create and track metrics for success.

Be Transparent

In entrusting young people with so much responsibility, the Kentucky Student Voice Team requires radical transparency.

The Team promotes numerous Slack channels which anyone can join, and hosts few virtual conversations which are not widely advertised to others too. The KSVT is also open regarding all levels of internal decision-making and has designed a process allowing for all members, regardless of seniority, to self-select into leadership roles.

While in the past, sensitive conversations about such issues as compensation for adults and youth, the selection process for student speakers, and the need for young people to step back from the work could be obscured, the need for transparency at all levels increased exponentially as the organization moved to an independent youth-led one. That is at least in part because in spinning off from the parent organization, youth and older allies landed on the same steep learning curve. As the managing partner put it: "Adults like me are learning right alongside younger people. I have never before managed an entire organizational budget nor had to figure out all the related legal, governance, development and other issues around running our own nonprofit. There is an urgent need—but also great desire—to figure this all out together."

In the last year, the student leadership Slack channel became public, enabling all members to view and to join it. And since the KSVT became its own independent organization, students have been participating in more operational discussions—work that includes board design, development, and compensation strategies for both personnel and programming.

II. Build a Collectivist Team Culture (Deemphasize Titles!)

A solid team culture is the building block of any high functioning team. The Kentucky Student Voice Team draws upon a collectivist team culture and organizational structure that, wherever possible, centers

Collectivist Team Culture: a culture where the voices of all members are equitably valued and equally respected, creating an inclusive and collaborative flat organization

the interests of the group over those of individuals. Though there is an important relationship between civic virtue and the collectivist culture the Team supports, they are not one in the same.

Unlike civic virtue, a collectivist perspective pushes beyond individual responsibility and centers relationships with others. Collectivism demands non-hierarchical structures, while civic virtue alone can co-exist with more exclusivity. In the context of the KSVT, the purpose is to lower barriers and make sure activities are accessible to all students at all times. In this way, all members of the KSVT community, new and experienced youth and adults alike, can offer meaningful input on operations and programmatic activity.

The self-selected membership structure of the Team serves as a primary example of this collectivist culture. The KSVT does not require an application, particular academic or professional experience, or any dues to join. Instead, the organization integrates new members based largely on their expression of interest. Self-selection extends to different programming and operational teams as well as more defined leadership roles.

Joining the Kentucky Student Voice Team can require some courage. Most students are unfamiliar with co-designing and co-leading such deep, collaborative work, often because the Team supports a deep bench of youth mobilizing other youth around profound and meaningful work with minimal external oversight. But by providing ways for students to engage in activities at a range of entry points as they are willing and comfortable and by valuing their unique lived experience, the KSVT supports students to deepen their capacities and confidence to participate.

Consistent with one of the KSVT's core beliefs that shifting power is a prerequisite to creating more just schools and communities, decisions are made in a transparent, democratic way. The KSVT has not had or needed a strictly defined process for decision-making in most cases but rather applies the norms and values

that guide the Team across the board to decision-making processes. This means not only including as many involved parties as possible in decision-making conversations but in the process through which the norms and values that ungird these decision-making spaces are shaped. Additionally, so many of these norms are learned and unlearned in informal ways—not merely through a conversation in which team members are explicitly discussing them but through engaging in the day-to-day work, always prioritizing relationships and keeping anti-oppression at the center.

Making decisions within a collectivist team culture looks like: equitable attention toward those in the space or those relevant outside of it who are most directly impacted by the issue/s; no person's input or opinion having more weight than anyone else's (except in rare cases i.e. addressing confidential matters); transparency for the sake of record-keeping and those who are not present at the time the decision is made; open-forum decision-making in almost all cases (meaning all members are welcome and encouraged to participate as much or as little as they like).

For the KSVT in recent years, this has known few bounds. High schoolers are key decision makers even—and more accurately especially—with regards to budgeting and finances. The KSVT board meetings are open to all members and the body is deemphasized in favor of the Student Leadership Team and holds little power that the Student Leadership Team does not influence.

III. Establish Communication System and Norms

A consistent communication platform and system is vital to mobilize members and keep track of different projects and initiatives.

In addition to communications structures, establishing organizational norms is essential to the KSVT's co-design process. By defining the organization's values

and priorities, and inviting students to help test and develop them, the KSVT acclimates new members and builds trust across the organization. Examples of norms include stating pronouns during introductions, being ready and willing to learn, and being respectful when disagreeing. Having a tangible list, or simply stating norms aloud, offers a valuable guide to the culture members are constantly co-creating and refining, and clarity about the way things run is always helpful.

The KSVT uses Slack, a virtual communication platform, which enables members to directly message each other, create group channels for projects they are involved in, and react to messages to signify that they've read them. The Kentucky Student Voice Team coordinates many projects simultaneously, making the function of "channels" in Slack particularly beneficial. The KSVT recognizes that members may not always feel comfortable sending a message to the entire group, so having some option to either create subgroups or directly message other members can help all members feel a sense of belonging. Establishing a balance between formality and informality is important beforehand because members will be deterred from encouraging and "hyping up" others if they do not feel the space allows for that behavior.

The KSVT advises its members to turn notifications on and be as expressive as possible, so that the team can make quick, collaborative decisions. But when a member is found unresponsive, the culture is not punitive. Rather, the assumption is that there must be an important reason why they are not communicating. By checking in and asking directly about a member's capacity to communicate, the team can better appreciate and respond to bandwidth issues and other needs.

In the course of communicating in this way, students also develop a sense of community. Daily and continuously, KSVT members are communicating through various online mediums like Zoom and Slack. Sometimes, these conversations are serious and structured, and sometimes too, they give way to more casual banter. The professional and relational balance fosters the development of friendships as well as highly engaged and productive teams, which creates a competent and caring environment. This communication also creates a sense of understanding between members who are mindful of one another's work capacity and strive to accommodate their needs. The flexibility affords youth the ability to stay involved and also remain attentive to their external commitments, particularly family and school obligations. The care and attention around individual needs and capacity creates an environment that is empathetic and joyful.

While in-person meetings may work well for many groups, it is also important not to underestimate the possibilities of virtual meetings for youth-led work. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began and since its move to organizational independence, the Kentucky Student Voice Team has become fully virtual. Operating in digital space allows the Team to accommodate students across the state who face transportation and other accessibility barriers while also limiting the overhead costs that come with managing physical property. In the KSVT's case, being fully virtual has also been a tool for ensuring equity as any advantage formerly associated with the ability to show up at a single location at a certain time no longer exists. KSVT's virtual experience has further affirmed that meaningful work does not need to be done in person, and it is entirely possible to build and sustain personal relationships that undergird professional work virtually.

IV. Nothing is Permanent—Adapt + Learn as You Go

In intergenerational partnerships, adaptability is critical to success in an ever-changing environment, both internally and externally. Within the organization's structure, individuals must be able to accommodate changes involving capacity, project trajectory, leadership structure, etc., initiated by youth leaders or adult allies. It also is important for all members of an organization to be able to learn as they go, especially from one another.

Learning should go both ways because education justice is collaborative; it is vital for all involved in intergenerational partnerships to learn from and grow with each other.

KSVT meetings are rarely monotonous as they are always designed by the members participating. General meetings and events ebb and flow in regard to structure, often testing new methods and strategies. Sometimes, meetings are very organized in terms of an agenda and output goals, but at other times, meetings are more relaxed and social to allow for discussion and brainstorming and fit the needs of the Team in that moment.

Member composition is also constantly evolving, which affects the Team's workflow and dynamics. The work is entirely dependent on the Team, so it is important to accommodate members and allow for them to contribute maximally in the context of their real-time bandwidth. Because of the constant evolution of team composition and practices, the membership team itself constantly revises its recruitment and onboarding strategies to better represent Kentucky youth and ensure that the KSVT's work is reflective of their diversity. The nature of the work allows for even new members to jump in and immediately connect with various ongoing projects. There are no rigid protocols about how work must be done, as KSVT members are continually refining even the most granular details of what a project should look like and opening up the design process to others even as the work unfolds. The adaptability of the Team allows for a rapid response. Members are accustomed to change, which allows them to pivot and mobilize quickly.

Leadership roles within the KSVT are also very fluid. Members will often share responsibilities and lead different components, operating with great flexibility. As young people and as full-time students, KSVT members' availability and capacities are constantly changing, oftentimes without their complete control. As members manage competing demands such as homework, college applications, family obligations, and other extracurricular interests, and as members graduate high school and abruptly begin new lives, there is ample space for newer people to fill in activity gaps and step up into defined leadership roles. Because of this flexibility within the KSVT organizational structure, and because adults with more agency over their daily lives also can help ensure steady work flows, innovations can bubble up quickly and greater numbers of people can help shape the group's direction.

V. Build in Monitoring and Evaluation

Doing this work and implementing these kinds of programmatic changes are only half the battle. It is arguably even more critical for an organization to monitor and evaluate their efforts—both to track information to learn from and help improve the organization and to determine whether the organization is having its desired effects.[11] The consistent tracking and collection of both quantitative and qualitative data enables an organization to:

- Track progress towards and be held accountable for their intended impact and theory of change
- Ensure programs are implemented as designed
- Learn about ways to achieve even better results
- Communicate progress and successes both internally and externally to everyone from staff to funders to the broader community
- Gain insights about program effectiveness and what works to prepare for rigorous program evaluations in the long-run[12]

For folks who are new to monitoring and evaluation, it is helpful to start with establishing a mission statement and vision for the future. This exercise is used to develop an organization's purpose and core values. Then it is also beneficial to consider a theory of change

to identify both short and long-term organizational goals and help members decide why and how to make that change happen. After that, the organization will need to identify resources that help them know if they are moving in the right direction, including: making a plan to measure, choosing what to measure, and deciding how to measure it. The metrics they intend to measure themselves against can include:

- Growth in membership
- Number of new projects launched
- Number of youth taking on leadership roles
- Growth in fundraising/financial support from donors

Surveys are an especially valuable tool for how organizations can measure their work, particularly pre- and post-surveys at the start and end of each year.

Pre- and post-surveys are a simple tool and the quickest first step for organizations to take. This creates the opportunity to check in and hear direct feedback from team members and gives members a platform to self-report and help establish benchmarks for future organizational work.

Such surveys are an effective method for obtaining quantitative information through data which can be translated easily into infographics and shared with internal and external parties. Surveys are also a great way of gathering qualitative information through personal feedback and reflections. (This is especially beneficial when tracking the evolution and progression of intangible lessons learned and areas of improvement. For example, an organization interested in evaluating students' civic knowledge could conduct a pre- and post- attitudinal survey to track if their understanding of democratic concepts has improved over time.) Deeper reflections may also be gathered through focus groups, individual interview conversations, and other more time-intensive tools.

Between benchmark pre- and post-surveys, organizations can also send out polls to check in with members periodically throughout the year. Such methods often serve as helpful pulse checks for a group to know that they are on the right track and their efforts are making an impact. This reinforces the notion that maintaining constant communication and encouraging knowledge-sharing across the organization truly benefits all involved.

As an organization gains insights about program effectiveness and what works, it can begin to prepare for a more rigorous program evaluation. The ideal way for an organization to gauge the impact of their work is through an impact evaluation. However, this endeavor is for programs that are stable and unlikely to change in fundamental ways as it is a time-intensive and expensive undertaking that requires at least three years of data and an independent third party for analysis. An impact evaluation is a great option for established organizations who want to replicate or scale up their program and something for new organizations to work towards over time.

FURTHER READING: BACKGROUND ON C&S AND OST
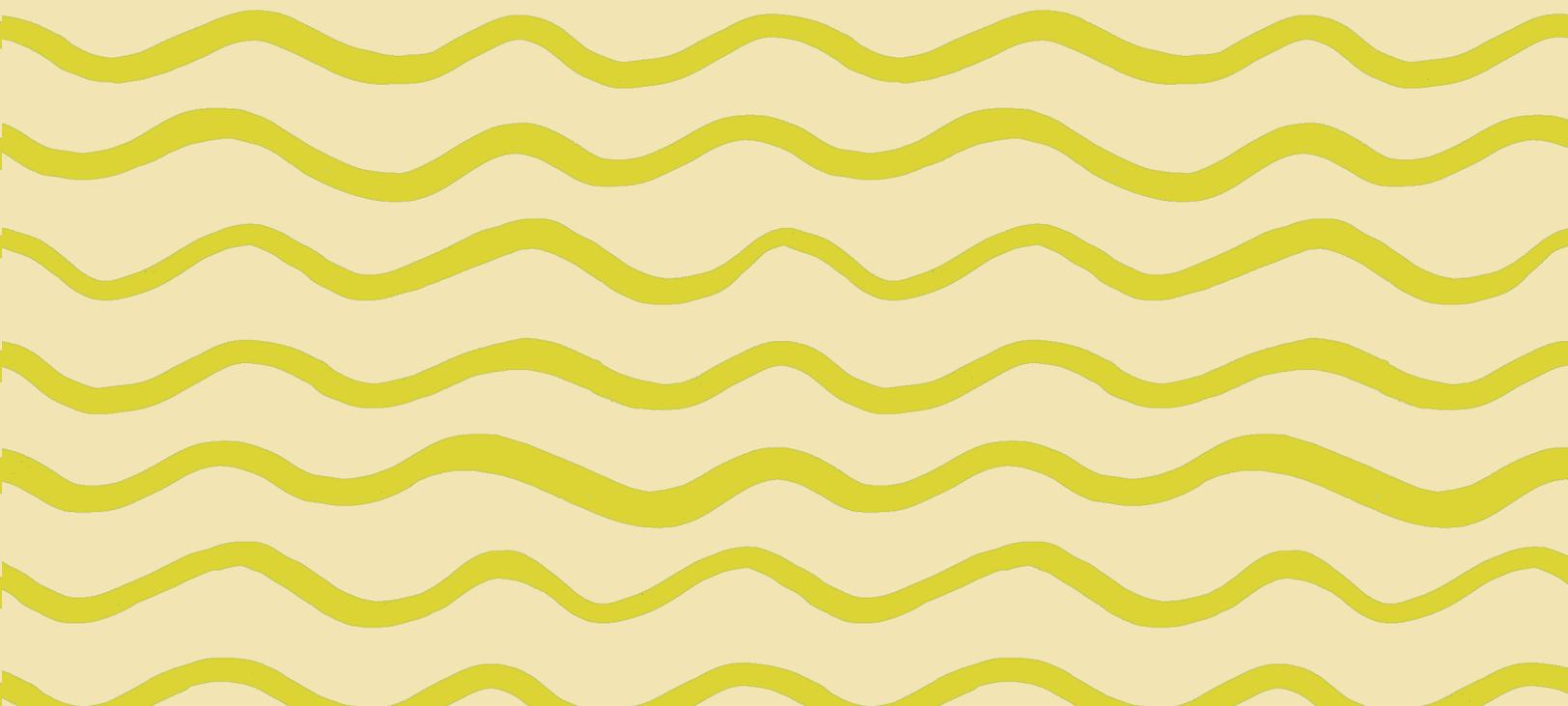
MORE ABOUT CIVIC LEARNING & LEADERSHIP BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The Civic Spring Project

In 2020, C&S piloted youth-led civic engagement work with the first Civic Spring Project, to test the hypothesis that significant civic learning happens outside of the classroom and—for that civic learning to be deep and equitable—young people need to play a substantial role in designing those learning experiences. By supporting six grantees from across the country, C&S sought to address gaps in our understanding of civic learning, reduce barriers to equitable civic access, and build sustainability in the civic engagement space.

The lessons learned from the Civic Spring Project were countless. For one, independent evaluation by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), part of Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life, validated the hypothesis.[13] Highlights from CIRCLE's report include:

- 96% of young people said they were learning what would typically be part of a Civics class during their Civic Spring Project (**civic knowledge**).

- More than 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the Civic Spring Project helped them find or strengthen their own voice (**civic skills**).

- 61% said that they often or very often helped make their city or town a better place for people to live (**civic dispositions**).

Just as important as the evaluative report was the experience of working with youth-led and youth-centered organizations. Through regular communication with the six grantee organizations and a summer-long intergenerational and youth-led Community of Practice, C&S highlighted the power of intergenerational partnerships, youth leadership, and out-of-school civic engagement.

We are eager to share these findings as we work to share the role of youth engagement in their own civic learning. A key piece of this work is sharing the progress and lessons learned widely so that others in the civic learning space can benefit from what was learned through the Civic Spring Project pilot.

Youth-created or Co-designed Civic Initiatives: Challenges & Opportunities

For far too long, many young people and especially historically marginalized individuals—including those from the BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and the disabled communities—have internalized the notion that they don't have the power or authority to contribute to civic spaces. Many adults, including some who work with youth, have embraced and perpetuated this misunderstanding and this has is too often reflected in community-based programs and organizational structures.

Spaces need to be created for relationship-building between youth and adults. Simultaneously, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the organizational culture and historical understandings of organizational management and hierarchy. The Civic Spring Project highlighted the ways in which youth can own this work (including research, storytelling, community organizing); and that when they are compensated for their efforts it changes the cultural narrative of limited youth capacity and shifts young peoples' trajectory, career paths, and lives overall. Youth engaged in this work at the middle- and high school ages are most positively impacted.

Unfortunately, options for youth engagement in civic spaces in the United States often lack meaning or impact. There are minimal opportunities for youth to engage in civic activities beyond student councils or youth advisory councils. Young people indicate that they want to be involved in their communities in meaningful ways, but the options are not obvious and/or youth face multiple barriers to entry including lacking access to adequate transportation and limited financial capacity.

There are also the challenges of engaging and sustaining youth voice. For traditionally adult-led and adult-centered organizations, integrating young people can introduce myriad logistical challenges. What's more, youth in the United States are busy: they balance school, sports, extracurricular activities and/or work. For developmental and mental health reasons, they need down time and sleep. Most are walking the tightrope between adolescence and adulthood.

This is not to say that youth cannot and should not be prioritized in civic spaces. Youth-led organizations, and adult-led organizations hoping to engage youth in meaningful ways, can start with some of the foundational considerations described above when building a project or reimagining spaces and organizations with youth-centered focus. For those who need evidence to support this shift, there's a growing body of research that shows that meaningfully engaging young people in co-design and co-leadership in civic spaces is of benefit to them and to the community.

The Collective Value of Out-of-school Time

Research has shown that effectively creating civic learning opportunities outside of school will have a positive impact on what happens *inside* of schools. **Students who are engaged in civic learning increase their college readiness and persistence; with greater gains made by those historically underrepresented in college.**[14][15]

A thorough review of available research concludes that K-12 and college students who participate in civic engagement—especially service learning—not only earn higher grade point averages, but also have higher retention rates and are more likely to graduate. Students engaged in civic and service learning demonstrate improved academic content knowledge, critical thinking skills, written and verbal communication, and leadership skills. And notably, these students also show increased interest in becoming personally and professionally involved in future community enhancement projects.[16] At the elementary and secondary level, students who participate in civic learning are more likely to stay in school, graduate from high school, enroll in college, and earn a college degree. **The gains in student achievement and outcomes improve even more dramatically among student populations which have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education (including students of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds).**[17]

There are three reasons why civic learning leads to increased student achievement and outcomes. **Students who participate in civic learning:**

- **Receive more academic content.**[18] Student learning is deeper and more durable through application: students shift from being knowledge receivers to idea creators. Students grapple with abstract concepts in different contexts and consider, apply, test, assess, and reevaluate multiple disciplinary approaches to solve an array of human, mechanical, and environmental challenges.

- **Gain higher-order skills**— including critical thinking, writing, communication, mathematics, and technology—at more advanced levels.[19] In efforts to create socially-equitable communities, students encounter opportunities to hone innovative

approaches which different situations require. By conjoining the academic knowledge and skills necessary to address community needs, students deepen and extend their learning.

- **Increase their emotional intelligence** which motivates them toward conscientious community engagement.[20] They also gain interpersonal effectiveness, the ability to collaborate across diverse perspectives, and a sense of self-efficacy for positively impacting individuals, organizations, and communities. With civic learning, knowledge and insight no longer exist in the abstract; they become the building blocks of community involvement.

Youth-led projects—for youth, by youth—can achieve greater reach, depth, and sustainability in local communities while providing learning labs for young people to develop, strengthen, and apply new civic skills and dispositions. Like all civic engagement, youth engagement is more than just about politics (though the youth vote was historically high in the 2020 election). Youth play an active role in civic life: they are community members and consumers; they are often taxpayers; they use public spaces and play on public sports fields; they are church-members and the only ones who have firsthand knowledge of being students during a global pandemic. There is incredible value in supporting youth-led organizations and integrating youth voice and leadership into historically adult-focused spaces. Youth already play a role in building civic health in the United States. Young people and adults alike must recognize this unique role and work together to provide more meaningful opportunities. Not only does this benefit our communities, but, as outlined above, it can benefit our collective future by enhancing in-school learning, college attainment, and college retention.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As we continue to strengthen and lift up the work of youth-led, youth-centered, and intergenerational out-of-school-time organizations, the Institute for Citizens & Scholars aims to build and connect a growing network of young people and out-of-school providers who can work together to solve our current civic learning crisis.

These efforts will include:

- Connecting youth grouped by civic interest and skill to receive mentoring primarily from other youth leaders;

- Bringing youth and adults together to address intergenerational power dynamics and to build knowledge, skills, and mindsets together. As the KSVT says: *"From power shift to power lift."*;

- Assisting programs considering the transition from adult-led to youth-led and intergenerational power-sharing frameworks and addressing the barriers to youth-led civic engagement; and

- Continuing to share stories and lessons learned from Civic Spring Project Partners and other exemplary OST organizations.

For C&S, it is critical that the OST field is increasingly recognized as the space where youth build civic skills and dispositions that help bolster school-based learning and provide opportunities for young people to lead in civic spaces across the country. To best support the field, C&S is committed to giving organizations like the Kentucky Student Voice Team and others a platform to share their history, practices, and lessons learned so that the field can begin to develop common standards of and co-develop measurement tools for civic learning in the OST field and beyond. C&S is further committed to creating tools to support Communities of Practice participants in making the transition to youth-led and intergenerational co-led spaces. Lastly, C&S plans to build a network of young people and adult allies working in civic spaces who can engage and learn from each other and build coalitions, and to help co-design and co-lead the national movement to build our civic strength. Many thanks to the Kentucky Student Voice Team for their partnership, work, and wisdom. C&S looks forward to continuing to inform, engage, and galvanize the field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this case study would not have been possible without the incredible support and contributions from the following individuals:

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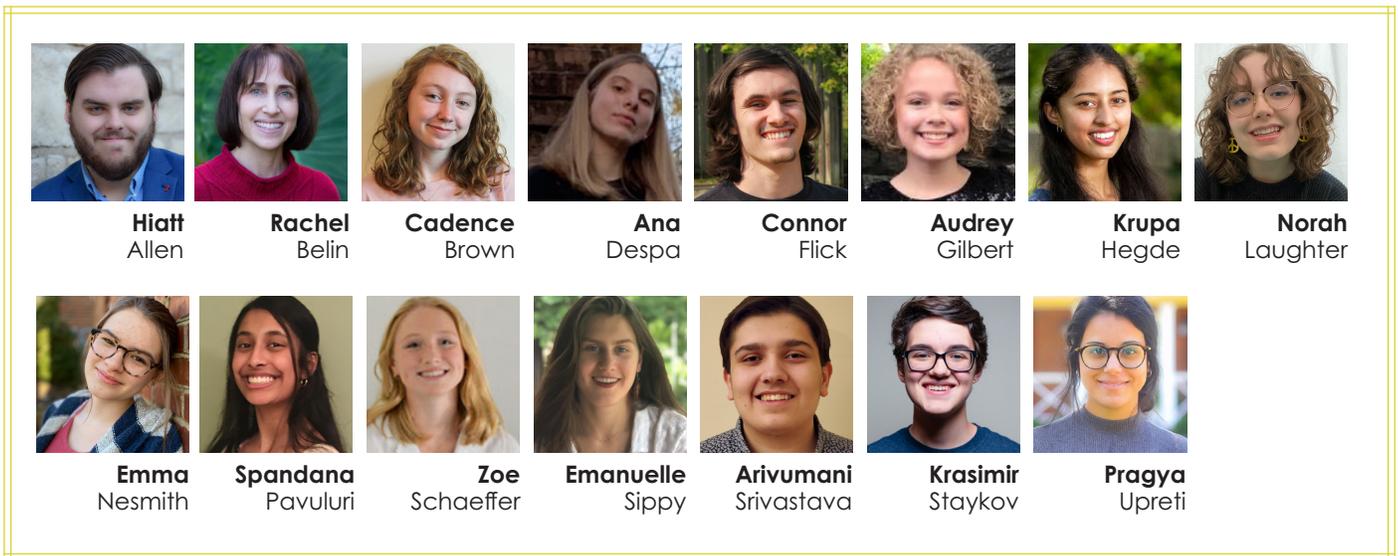
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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
KSVT Background and Timeline Resources

2012 to 2013:
Think Tank Year – No Formalized Structure

Video clip - "PC Presentation on Final Thoughts"
a brief video which the Team shared at the end of their presentation to wrap up their arguments

Full video - "Case for Student Integration at the Prichard Committee"
Team's full presentation

2013 to 2014:
Pilot Year – Start of Executive Leadership Circle

The KSVT's speech on "Inadequate Funding"
(collectively developed and delivered by the group)

Article - Lexington-Herald Leader piece
"Dunbar senior pleads case, asks lawmakers to restore $336 million to schools"

The KSVT's larger strategic goals for the year, including establishing an "Adult Brain Trust"

Screenshots of a three-month project rotation structure with initial topics
this process was structured around the KSVT's monthly meetings

The KSVT's Executive Council Proposal: for the executive committee and defined titles and roles

First KSVT Strategy Session Agenda for further discussion of the structure

The KSVT's Second Proposal with leadership team issues

2014 to 2015:
Initial Committee Model

Article - Courier Journal piece: "Students at the core of legislation" on Common Core

Final report on "Uncovering the Tripwires to Postsecondary Success"

Prichard Committee Student Voice Team organizational flow chart

Prichard Committee Student Voice Team - New Committee Structure Roles

Courier Journal article link: "Prichard Committee's Student Voice Team 'does democracy'"

2015 to 2016:
Expanded Committee Model

Student Voice School Climate Audit

The KSVT's 2015-2016 Executive Committee description
including a detailed list of roles, areas of work, and the first mention of regional work

2016 to 2018:
Refined Committee Model

"Students as Partners" Policy Report

Ready or Not (a book written by the KSVT)

Link to the KSVT's Student Voice Forum

Lexington Herald Leader article link "Financial aid for up to 30,000 restored at the wire"
Powerball Promise Campaign

The KSVT's Leadership team description - Fall 2016

The KSVT's Early 2017 - Organizational Flow Chart , see page 2

2018 to 2020:
Mobilization Circle

The KSVT's 2018 Activation Levels Chart

The KSVT's 2019 - 2020 Organizational Flow Chart

2019-2020 KSVT Defined Mobilization Circle Roles list

KSVT article link: "Getting Beyond Guns"

Media packet for the "March for our Lives KY" outdoor rally

The KSVT's article link:
"Beyond Guns: Student Testimony on School Safety, Climate, and Culture"

KSVT Mobilization Chart

Senate Bill One, the School Safety and Resiliency Act

2020 to 2021:
The Core Team

[2012–2021 KSVT Full Timeline](#)

[Coping with COVID Student-to-Student Survey](#)

2021 to 2022:
Unicorns, Flowers, and the Move to Independence

[2021 Organizational Flower Flow Chart](#)

Courier Journal article link:
"[Students slam Senate plan to cut student, teacher seats on Kentucky Board of Education](#)"
#SaveOurSeats campaign

[Highland Middle School's Student Snapshot Report](#)
climate audit sample

Courier Journal article link:
"[Kentucky Board of Education: Students and teachers deserve seat](#)"

APPENDIX B
Resources on KSVT Pro-Tips and Impact-Ready Recommendations

Engage Youth in Every Aspect of the Work

Article - 2021 SAGE Journal piece
"Power and Adult Support in Student Voice Efforts for Policy Change"

Build a Collectivist Team Culture (e.g. deemphasizing titles)

Description—What are "unicorns"? (screenshot from the KSVT's Slack channel)

Video link on intergenerational collaboration from Seek Common Ground webinar

Build in Monitoring and Evaluation

KSVT Jamboard SWOT Analysis

SVT's 12.20 board report to the parent organization
(including year-end creative metrics, two weeks before moving to independence)

Key Things to Know About the KSVT

For New & Returning Members
Fall 2021

Here is some distilled information that should further help you acclimate to the Kentucky Student Voice Team (KSVT). And whether you are a new or returning member, having a sense of the following concepts, channels, and contacts will allow you to hit the ground running with us as soon as you are ready this year!

Our Mission

We are young people co-creating more just, democratic Kentucky schools and communities as research, policy, and advocacy partners.

We Are Independent

Living for eight years as a program of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a larger statewide organization, the Kentucky Student Voice Team spun off in January 2021 to become our own independent non-profit. As we continue to figure out legal, financial, and other things in this dramatic transition and await our official documentation from the Internal Revenue Service, the Bluegrass Community Foundation is serving as our fiscal sponsor.

We Are Youth Led

Though **Rachel Belin** is a full-fledged adult and our full-time managing partner, her role and goal are to support young people to co-design and lead the programming and organization as a whole. Among other things, that means that young people advise the board, manage project teams and budgets, set goals, metrics, and communication strategies, and co-write grant proposals. Rachel and our other adult allies including two of the SVT's co-founders, **Andrew Brennen** and **Hiatt Allen**, provide communications, technical, legal, legislative, finance and other support as needed or requested. Not-so-coincidentally, the KSVT has been invited to speak about how we do intergenerational partnership across the country, is the subject of a peer-reviewed research study on the subject, and has become a national model for how adults and youth can work in education policy spaces as co-equals.

Communications & Meetings

SLACK is our single most important means of daily coordination keeping our community mobilized

and engaged. Our managing partner, Rachel Belin, posts a Monday "Needs-to-Know-Basis Bulletin" on our general channel that is specially designed to help orient new people to the most important things happening each week and provide ways to tap into the action. For best results, [click here to download the app and join our Slack](). Then, be sure to turn on your notifications, check the Slack daily, introduce yourself in our **#introduceyourself channel**, and leave an emoji when you can to indicate your interest or love for anything you see!! If you have any questions, contact Rachel or contact Hiatt Allen at hiatt@ksvt.org.

Although the majority of our work happens on our Slack and the many project channels in the sidebar, joining our one-hour **GENERAL MONTHLY MEETINGS** is the single best way to get a big-picture overview of what we do and why we do it and help build the community that makes it all possible. We regularly post the link to join and reminders on our Slack, and all we ask is that you let us know month to month with an emoji whether we can expect to see you on the screen—or not.

Structure

In terms of internal power distribution and leadership, we support a **FLATARCHY**. This means we only use titles when necessary to describe specific roles or point people, and we define leadership as the ability to bring others along with us. In the last year, we created what we call **THE UNICORNS** comprising members on our **#unicorn channel** stepping up to leadership roles. (The name derives from the fact that in the world of typical high school extracurricular activities, such collaborative leadership, like a unicorn, is exceedingly rare.) Unicorns select themselves and commit themselves to attending standing monthly **zooms on Thursdays at 8:00 pm ET** to help us think through big-picture issues. Those issues include everything from shaping the board agenda to thinking through our budget and recruitment to fundraising, project management, and loads more. Anyone can join our unicorn channel at any time as long as they can generally commit to being as accessible, responsive, and as collaborative as the role requires.

Programming

Though in any given year, the current students in our group co-design how we translate our mission into action, we do have a few activities that are considered signature. This means they are something we have been developing and offering consistently over time, and they generally are open to everyone. Here are those **SIGNATURE ACTIVITIES** with the name of the Slack channels and student or students who help coordinate them too:

Membership Team

Here at the Student Voice Team, we are constantly thinking about how to engage students from underrepresented backgrounds in our work and integrate new members throughout the year. Ever-so-fortunately, this year, we have a dedicated member who, along with a team of other interested members, is leading the charge to design recruitment and capacity-building programming and

other support for members who are newer to our team. Visit our **#membershipteam channel** on Slack or contact **membership coordinator Cadence Brown** for more information on how you can benefit from the membership team's programming or serve on the team to support others.

Blog

The Student Voice Forum is our blog which serves as a platform for independent student voice around a range of education issues. Anyone who would like to write or edit for the blog or serve on our editorial board should visit our **#media-studentvoiceforum channel** and reach out to **blog co-editor-in-chiefs Sara Falluji, Ana Despa, and Norah Laughter**.

Podcast

Get Schooled is our podcast available on Spotify which also serves as a platform for independent student voice around a range of education issues. To get involved, just visit our **#media-podcast channel** on Slack and contact **executive producer Emma Nesmith**.

Policy Team

The Student Voice Team works on a range of bipartisan education policies and legislative priorities each year, both pro and reactively. If being a part of our policy team is an area of interest, visit our **#legislative channel** on Slack and contact **legislative coordinator Ari Srivastava**.

School Climate Audits

When schools were physically open, and over the last few years, we pioneered something called "student-led school climate audits". This had members of our team leading school climate workshops across the state and teaching students how to conduct and share back an analysis of their school with their entire school community. During the pandemic, we adapted our methods and developed a series of virtual coaching sessions to work with teams of middle and high school students and teachers to design survey and interview protocols to reach hundreds of other students and teachers in their schools and delve deeply into the ways in which their schools fostered safe, inclusive, and engaging learning communities. We expect to conduct several more virtual coaching sessions during the 2021-22 school year. If you are interested being a part of this specific participatory-action-research initiative, join our **#climateaudits channel** on Slack and let **school climate coordinators, Sara Falluji or Audrey Gilbert** know!

Coping With COVID-19 Research

When COVID-19 closed our schools, we pivoted the work in a massive way to create our statewide Coping with COVID Student-to-Student Study. This was a reimagining of the audit to try to capture what Kentucky students were experiencing learning from home. Nearly 10,000 students from

almost all 120 of Kentucky's counties responded to our survey, and the team has been sharing the results with local and national audiences—including the Kentucky Board of Education, the Interim Joint Education Committee and the Aspen Institute—almost nonstop for the last year. This, as the team launched the second phase of the study involving a slew of peer-to-peer interviews with students representing the diversity of the state. Though the students leading this work have been trained to do it through an incredible partnership with researchers at the University of Kentucky, there are often opportunities for even our newest members to get involved! If this interests you in any way, join our **#covidinterviewingr2 channel** on Slack and contact **research coordinator Spandana Pavuluri**.

Workshops & Presentations

Hardly a week goes by that the SVT isn't presenting to a local or national education audience. Members are in demand as facilitators and panelists, and we are constantly asked to share everything ranging from our research on the impact of COVID on Kentucky students, the book we wrote about postsecondary transitions, our audit work around school climate and culture, how to integrate more students in school governance structures, and how we operationalize meaningful student voice in Kentucky. In most every instance, new members are welcome to join as either observers or co-facilitators. We typically will provide a script outline to guide you, and we post these opportunities regularly on various channels on our Slack, and you can always reach out to **managing partner Rachel Belin** directly if you want to know more or want in.

Ad Hoc Projects

In rapid response to real-time events, student energy, and interest, and sometimes too, the interest of our funders, the Kentucky Student Voice Team frequently supports shorter-term youth-led projects. This included four over the 2021 summer which are still at work straight through the beginning of the new school year. They are:

The Save Our Seats Project

On the heels of Kentucky's last legislative session which ended last spring and in which we successfully mobilized a coalition to protect the student seat on the Kentucky Board of Education that was under threat of removal, we are continuing the fight to expand student representation on all forms of school governance bodies. The work is part of our #SaveOurSeats campaign and is coordinated by **Save Our Seats Project Lead, Ana Despa**. With a team of others on our **#saveourseats channel**, Ana is updating the Students as Partners research and policy brief we produced a few years back and surveying Kentucky school boards, school administrators and Site Based Decision making councils in the process. The goal is to gather stories and statistics to generate more public conversation about what students can and should be able to do to normalize student representation in more school decision making spaces. If you too want to be a part of the project team, join our Slack channel and contact Ana Despa.

The American Rescue Plan Act Project

With the support of national funder, Seek Common Ground, since last June, members of our team have been working to ensure Kentucky students are part of the school district and state-level conversations about how to spend the billions of federal dollars that are headed to Kentucky schools over the next three years in response to the pandemic. Coordinated by **ARPA project lead, Connor Flick**, the team is interviewing and surveying students across the state to help produce media materials and a set of findings that will be shared with other states looking to include students as primary stakeholders in setting school spending priorities. Newer members can visit our **#arpa-funds channel** and contact Connor Flick directly to learn more.

The Measurement, Assessment & Accountability Project

As part of a second summer project funded by Seek Common Ground, we are attempting to amplify and elevate Kentucky student voices around the culture of assessments (testing) and measurement (grading) from elementary school through high school. **Project lead Audrey Gilbert** is coordinating a team of other members who have been leading conversations with young people across the state and capturing their perspectives for social and traditional news media outlets. If all goes as planned, and among other products, some of the materials will be used to produce a public radio series on Louisville's WFPL that will air this fall. Anyone interested in being a part of this effort can visit the **#maa-team channel** in Slack or contact Audrey Gilbert directly.

The History is Power Joint Partnership Project

In partnership with DICCE, (which stands for Diversity, Inclusion, Cultural Competency, and Equity), the youth-led group founded by SVT member Zoe Jenkins to "help Generation Z appreciate diversity, foster inclusion, and empower others to create equitable change" our team supports ongoing conversation and activities to respond to the local and national and politically charged conversations about how to talk about race in American public schools.
For more information on how you can help us design materials, shape the narrative, and prepare for upcoming legislation that would ban open discussion about race in Kentucky classrooms, visit our webpage, https://www.historyispower.org/, join the channel #responsive-history-project and let SVT **History is Power project partnership coordinator, Pragya Upreti** know.

APPENDIX C
Codebook and Evidence of
KSVT Organizational Good Practice Themes

A. ENGAGE YOUTH IN EVERY ASPECT OF THE WORK

Examples below

Daniela DiGiacomo shares the success of the process and emphasizes the intergenerational collaborative nature of the following project:

Connor Flick demonstrates the flexible and equitable playing field the organization operates on when it comes to youth research, work, and meeting times:

Spandana Pavuluri displays the collaborative and inclusive nature the organization encourages with its adult allies who perform intergenerational research:

Spandana Pavuluri 1:23 PM
Hi @channel ! Daniela wanted me to begin discussing authorship for the cye article and get the team's opinions. We have a couple of options here (you can react with the respective emoji)-
1. naming adult allies + ky stu voice team 🎆
2. naming adult allies+most involved students+ky stu voice team 👀
3. naming adult allies+all students who participated+ky stu voice team 🤔

If we choose option 2 or 3, we can order student names in terms of who was most involved or we can do it alphabetically. What do you guys think? Would love to discuss in a thread below this message!

👀 6   🎆 1   😊

🔵 **1 reply** 3 months ago

B. BUILD A COLLECTIVIST TEAM CULTURE

Examples below

Daniela DiGiacomo explains how KSVT members organize themselves into various teams based on self-selection and expression of interest in particular projects:

Daniela DiGiacomo 1:55 PM   Wednesday, March 17th ⌄

Hi all, thanks for those who met today, we have a fun chat, and here is what I understand as the next steps. We got even more clear on the 4 dimensions we are going to explore in related to the student experience of learning from home during COVID-19 (learning environment, relationships, well-being, ideas about the future) as well as the fact that we want to take an exploratory approach to understanding difference and variation along different lines. You can see those change reflected in the current working manuscript, here.   For next steps, we then self selected into subteams to take a deeper dive (looking at both the quant and qual data) into the 4 dimensions and other sections of the paper that need to be written. Here are the assignments, I believe:

Beth: Contribute to Introduction + Lit Review/Framing on History of Educational Inequity in Kentucky

Ellen: Contribute to methods section + lead general presentation of descriptives of quant data into 4 dimensions;

Connor: Contribute to Lit Review/Framing on what we know from others (in particular other student groups) about the students' educational experience in COVID

💚 1   😆 2   😀

To eliminate potential barriers to entry, Sara Falluji notifies all KSVT members and encourages them to join important events and conversations (even those outside of their designated team/project):

 # general – Sep 2nd

Sara Falluji 10:12 PM

hi everyone! here with an evening plug for the podcast team! this month, we're working on hosting a rountable conversation about returning to school, delving into stuff like the transition from last year into this year, social and academic setbacks due to COVID, and overall thoughts on the COVID precautions in schools. if you're interested in being part of this conversation, or you know someone else who might want to share their thoughts with us, we have a google form you can now fill out! thank you and have a nice night :D

🐷 ⬆️ 32 reactions

Emanuelle Sippy exhibits a few different ways in which KSVT members are able to contribute to various projects:

emanuelle sippy 9:53 AM

Reminder about two open invitations today @everyone ! Let me know if you're planning on coming just so we have a sense but anyone is also welcome to drop in last min :))

1. As part of our strategic planning process, we are doing a bit of landscaping (thinking critically about the niche we occupy, our partners' expertise, and folks we haven't really collaborated with but admire and hope to). To kick this off, we are having a conversation with the Kentucky Poor People's Campaign, a statewide, values-aligned adult-led organization. If you are interested in coming to discuss what they do, what we do, and any synergies (no matter how new you are!) please join us Thursday from 2:15-3:00 EST at this link.

2. In the wake of Manny Caulk's passing, FCPS is searching for a new superintendent. As part of the process, an external firm is looking to connect with various stakeholders. SVT has our own listening session with folks driving the search this Thursday from 5-6 EST. If you are a current or former FCPS student, please join us at this link.

(edited)

C. ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION SYSTEM AND NORMS

Examples below

KSVT utilizes Slack as their primary communication system—allowing members to keep track of different initiatives, respond to new inquiries and cheer on the work of their peers:

Regular virtual meetings and Slack updates (like this one from Rachel Belin) serve as opportunities to share organizational updates and acclimate newer members to the group (regardless of their respective locations/circumstances):

D. NOTHING IS PERMANENT—ADAPT + LEARN AS YOU GO

Examples below

Rachel Belin demonstrates the flexibility of meeting agendas and subsequent discussions based on shifting KSVT priorities and team needs:

Rachel Belin 10:58 AM
Hey @channel! Thanks for showing some interest in helping us plan our June 3rd virtual end-of-year Summerbration. Always nice to start with a wide-open brainstorm. We have a few items that we'll want to incorporate in the up-to-90-minute zoom, but exactly how we do that and whether we want to add additional items are up to you! Here are a few things we know we'd like to do:

- Something social that allows for youth and adults to connect
- Highlights of 20-21 work
- Tribute to graduating seniors
- Recognition of leadership transition
- Golden megaphone awards

Please feel very free to share any thoughts or additional ideas about the content of the celebration, how we should facilitate it, and anything else remotely related below, keeping in mind that there are NO wrong ideas in a brainstorming thread! We will follow up eventually with a live conversation! (edited)

4 replies Last reply 5 months ago

Rainesford Stauffer invites KSVT members to collaborate on a shared project, highlighting the adaptability of the project design process and a commitment to shared learning from all involved parties:

Rainesford Stauffer 9:09 AM
Hey team! Popping in with a general brainstorm doc we can use to get started. As you'll see, we've got two big action items: Deciding segment structure (i.e. how many segments, which will help us piece together what sources/data go where), and deciding on log lines, or big takeaways, of each segment. This is just to get us thinking; it's in no way prescriptive! I can't wait to collaborate with you all on bringing the incredible work you've done to life in this way! https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RGj_OJ-F55yIVcpmoJDtd6zyCAAvugUGvUdgWh3B3HY/edit?usp=sharing

👆 6   🏃 6   😊+

Once we decide on structure and themes, we'll move to actual script-writing and breaking down what sources/data should be in each segment. If you all are comfortable giving me access to some of the research, interviews, transcripts, etc., I'm happy to help parse through! (And would genuinely *love* to read through/listen to it all.) Thank you so much!

💕 6   💚 4   😊+

Rachel Belin invites new KSVT members to join the "unicorn" team, highlighting the fluidity of leadership roles and member composition as new folks join the organization:

Rachel Belin 11:25 AM   Thursday, September 9th ⌄
Hey newer member @channel! At the risk of TMI, I wanted you all to be aware that later today, the Student Voice Team is holding a "unicorn" meeting. This is for people on our team who like to help us think through strategic and organizational issues. As unusual as it sounds, while these sessions draw many of our experienced members who are leading various project teams, these meetings are actually wide open to newer members too!

Here's all you need to know:

🦄 Unicorns meet **TONIGHT from 8-9 pm EST** AT THIS LINK. @Connor F in his new role as cross-org coordinator will be facilitating following our working unicorn agenda doc which you can feel free to review and even comment on or edit right up until showtime.

As with all unicorn meetings, though we devote some time to coordinating programmatic communications across teams, we place the greatest emphasis on big-picture, strategic questions--the critical issues that are difficult to think about in the bustle of day-to-day work.

For tonight, we plan to continue to think about goals and metrics.

👉 *What are the most important things we want to accomplish as a whole organization this year?*
👉 *How can/do we measure our success?*

E. BUILD IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Examples below

Cadence Brown demonstrates internal efforts to qualify and measure the success of KSVT's work:

Thursday, September 16th ⌄

Cadence Brown 2:03 PM
hey @channel! i hope everyone has been doing well this month! as the unicorn team has been thinking generally about metrics for the org, we also need to be thinking about our membership metrics! we have already had one convo, but we want it to be ongoing. i have made a document with what we have already mentioned, but i would love if everyone could add comments to what we already have & add any metrics that you think would be good to evaluate our work!

Membership Metrics
Document from Google Drive

Thursday, September 16th ⌄

- **How should we measure our success?**
  - Metrics for success: What does this look like?
    - Ramp up time: joining the slack, first involved with KSVT, having first meeting with membership coordinator, joining a team meeting to doing your first project. **Difference in time that exists for each person.** Looking at ways to make it smaller, and how it goes over time.
    - Are they getting involved in Slack? Are they looking around at different Slack channels?
    - Project leads to look at new member involvement (meetings, slack), looking out for how they are interacting with the team
      - Membership team: checking in with project leads for how we can support the person better, where they may need

KSVT leaders check in regularly to monitor their progress and communicate their findings with the larger organization:

Monday, August 2nd ⌄

9:09 ⚡ **FOUR--THE RETREAT**
It was an especially exciting Sunday yesterday as members from across the state who comprise our so-called "unicorns" gathered in Lexington for a rare in-person event. The self-selected leadership team which meets twice monthly by zoom to talk through big-picture programming and organizational issues took some time to build connections and go deep on a few of the larger questions which continue to evolve and define what we do.

- *What is our unique added value to Kentucky's education landscape?*
- *How can we be more intentional about our commitment to justice in what we say and do?*
- *How do we measure our success?*
- *Pizza or Chicken?*

These were among the weighty ideas with which we white boarded and wrestled.

A giant thank you to those who made things happen, specifically, @Connor F @Cadence Brown @Audrey Gilbert @Krupa Hegde @Aditi Kona @Arivumani Srivastava @emanuelle @krasi @Irving Morris @slbograd @Norah Laughter @Spandana Pavuluri @Emma Nesmith @Sara Falluji @Bryson Berry @hiatt & @aebrennen --and some assurance to others that even though school has yet to start for most of Kentucky, things already are falling into place for an incredible new SVT school year.

APPENDIX D
The Civic Spring Project Information & Lessons Learned
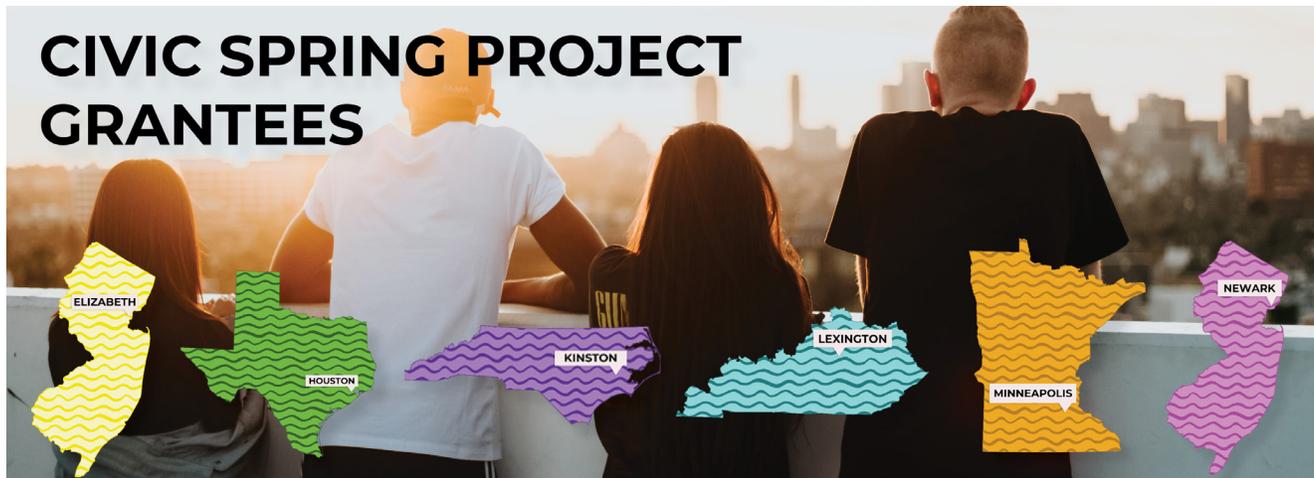
The Civic Spring Project and the value of the out-of-school-time field

In the Spring of 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastation as the backdrop, the Institute for Citizens & Scholars convened a multi-partisan taskforce of policymakers, experts, researchers, practitioners, philanthropists and young people. This group met over the course of several weeks to conceptualize a project and help C&S test the hypothesis that significant civic learning happens outside of the classroom and—for that civic learning to be deep and equitable—young people need to be at the table and play a substantial role in designing those learning experiences.

By June, C&S launched the first Civic Spring Project and granted significant funding to six youth-centered organizations across the United States to operationalize projects addressing either the pandemic-related challenges facing their communities, promotion of local civic engagement for the upcoming 2020 election, or both. The six organizations were selected from a competitive field of nearly 150 applicants. Priority was given to projects which were civic-minded, youth-led, youth-oriented, nonpartisan, nimble, measurement-focused, and/or generative. All selected grantees were organizations that were either led by young people or organizations that meaningfully partnered with, mentored, or directly involved youth. Local and/or national organizations were encouraged to form partnerships and steward youth-led organizations as they learned and worked together.

Through the support of each grantee, C&S sought to address the gaps in our understanding of civic learning, reduce the barriers to equitable civic access, and build sustainability in the civic engagement space.

I. CIVIC SPRING PROJECT SUCCESSES

The successes of the Civic Spring Project (CSP) were evident in the transformative work of its six grantee groups and the extent to which civic learning occurred. Through the work C&S learned that:

1. Meaningful civic learning and impact takes place outside of the formal school setting:

   - Recognition of the equity-advancing nature, flexibility and potential for relationship-building, networking, and learning in OST spaces

2. Program participants gained diverse types of civic skills and reported that CSP strengthened their:

   - Social-emotional learning capacities;
   - Abilities to navigate both civic institutions and their mental health; and
   - Strategies for working with stakeholders across lines of difference.

3. Youth-centered civic initiatives can have broad and deep community impact; for example through:

   - Advocating for policy change to city leaders;
   - Securing seats for youth on local government committees;
   - Holding voter registration events; and
   - Engaging local news media.

4. The Community of Practice was a platform which fostered bonding, linking, and bridging of social capital between grantees:

   - This demonstrated another example of OST as a critical space for development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
   - Within the Community of Practice, there was a deep commitment to transparency, equity in access and intentionality toward partnership with—not just including—young people.
   - CSP demonstrated the vast promise of intergenerational spaces and Communities of Practice to affect both local communities and young people engaged in real-world civic work. Furthermore, it provided a pathway forward for equitable civic spaces that fortify youth power.

II. CIVIC SPRING PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Civic Spring Project also revealed **multiple opportunities for improvement**. For example, in order to transform the field, future civic spaces must:

1. Broaden conceptions of civic learning;
2. Acknowledge, embrace, *and then learn* from the power dynamics and inherent, age-related inequity in intergenerational spaces;
3. Invest in sustainable community-building; and
4. Create conditions which allow our grantees to do the work with greater ease (this last point was especially applicable to smaller, grassroots, and youth-led organizations).

C&S also learned that **the OST field needs more support**. Providers report being disjointed and under-resourced (both in terms of funding and staffing), always strapped for time, and that they lack the measurement tools necessary to prove their value/impact. Out-of-school, after-school, and service-learning providers have unparalleled access to youth and are engaging youth to varied outcomes in general—but with nearly no outcomes in civic learning. This case study will serve as a resource to meet this need and help both providers *and* youth actively engaged in civic spaces by:

1. Providing a blueprint, tangible resources, and good practices to help guide and support organizations transitioning to a youth-led framework; and
2. Explaining how to measure and evaluate the durability of civic skills, dispositions and equity gained through OST programming.

APPENDIX E
CONVERSATION GUIDE TO BE USED WITH KSVT ASSESSMENT

The following is a list of questions to discuss with a group/team after completing the KSVT Assessment. There are three sets of questions based on your team's average score. Feel free to answer the questions in consecutive order, discuss one or two at a time, or create questions specific to your team or organization. (Please note this is a sample framework to help you get started, and any piece can be changed as needed
to suit your organization's individual needs!)

Suggested process:

- Ask team members to take some time to answer some or all of the answers below

- At a set time, select a facilitator to lead a discussion.

- Collect answers through a sticky-note or jam-board exercise for prioritization (considering each goal's complexity and time required to complete).

- Select a team member (or members) to create a project calendar to share with the group; assign accountability buddies or work groups as needed.

- Return to complete the assessment again and review progress in ~3 months, or integrate review and discussion into regular team check-ins.

Score: 0–11

1. Who is invited to important conversations?
   What are 2–3 concrete steps that can be taken to engage young people in organizational decision–making and leadership opportunities?

2. What problem(s) can be solved and/or improved for the team with greater intergenerational co-leadership?

3. Where are youth not yet included in our team structure?
   What short-term and long-term changes can we make?
   What obstacles will we face?

4. What are 1–2 action steps that we can take to uplift youth voices?

5. What does it mean to have intergenerational co-leadership?
   If we waived a magic wand and achieved this goal, what would be different?
   What would stay the same?

6. How do we measure growth and evolution currently?
   What concrete steps can we take in the immediate future to prioritize internal growth and a shared commitment to evolving?
   Short-term steps? Longer-term steps?
   What indicators will we use to demonstrate that we're doing this better/well?

7. How do we currently communicate with each other?
   What are 1–2 ways that we might shift our communication to be more accessible to all?
   What documents or systems can we create to increase our ability to share knowledge and/or flatten power imbalances?

8. On a scale of 1–5, how transparent are we?
   What are 1–2 things that we can do to bump that metric 1 or 2 steps in the right direction?

9. What do we need to do to start compensating young people for their time and expertise? Are there funds to shift? Funding opportunities?
   What are 1–2 short-term and long-term goals?

NOTES:

Score: 12–23

1. What are 1–2 good examples of how young people (peers) engage in decision–making and leadership?
   What are 2–3 next steps to better place young people in organizational decision–making and leadership opportunities?

2. What problem(s) can be solved and/or improved for the team with greater intergenerational co-leadership?

3. What are 1–2 current activities that best demonstrate how we uplift youth voices? In what ways might we capitalize on these activities and/or find new ways to further this work? What is the best way to approach this task?

4. What does intergenerational co-leadership look like for us?
   If we waived a magic wand and instantly achieved this goal, what would be different? What would stay the same?

5. How do we measure growth and evolution?
   How can we work together to further prioritize internal growth and a shared commitment to evolution? What indicators will we use to help us show that we are doing this consistently and well?

6. In what ways do we communicate well with each other?
   What documents or systems do we have in place that help us share knowledge and/or flatten discrepancies? What new documents or systems can we build?

7. On a scale of 1–5, how transparent are we across systems? What are 1–2 things that we can do to move us further in the in the right direction?

8. Do we currently compensate young people for their time?
   Is the compensation adequate? How might we improve this?

NOTES:

Score: 24–35

1. How do young people (peers) engage in decision–making and leadership?
   Are there 1–2 steps we can take that might further place young people at the center of organizational decision–making and leadership?

2. What current problem(s) or issues will be addressed and/or improved with intergenerational co–leadership?

3. How do we effectively uplift youth voices?
   How might we further this work in our team and/or how might we share our knowledge with others in our community?

4. What does intergenerational co–leadership look like for us?
   If we could change one thing about how we co–lead, what would it be?

5. Are there ways we can work together to further prioritize internal growth and evolution? What indicators will we use to help us show that we're doing this consistently and well?

6. Consider ways that communication practices/strategies allow knowledge–sharing. Are there other documents or systems to implement that would help further knowledge–and power–sharing?

7. On a scale of 1–5, how transparent are we as a team?
   What is 1 thing we can immediately do to maximize our transparency?
   What might hold us back?

8. Do we currently compensate young people for their time?
   Are there ways to improve this process? New or innovative ways to think about youth compensation?

NOTES:

ENDNOTES

1 An "analytic program model" characterizes the core elements of program design shared by all intergenerational learning. It is a model that connects broad program goals and desired outcomes to effective program offerings (this definition comes from Global Cities; for more information, see page 10).

2 Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). (2021). An Evaluation of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars' Civic Spring Project. Medford, MA: Author.

3 "Tiven, M. B., Fuchs, E. R., Bazari, A., & MacQuarrie, A. (2018). Evaluating Global Digital Education: Student Outcomes Framework. New York, NY: Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development."

4 Civic knowledge, skills and dispositions: these three dimensions of civic learning and expression were described by Dr. Danielle Allen of Harvard University as part of her *Democratic Knowledge Project*. Vinnakota, 2019.

5 *From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis and Case for Collaboration*; Vinnakota, 2019.

6 Gelmon and Kreger, American Democracy Project, Defining Civic Health: Project Report, 2013.

7 McDermott, "Civic Virtue, and Why It Matters", National Constitution Center, 2020

8 Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity. By Etienne Wenger, Cambridge University Press, 1998

9 National Council of Nonprofits, 2021

10 Holquist SE, Walls J. Power and Adult Support in Student Voice Efforts for Policy Change. Educational Policy. July 2021. doi:10.1177/08959048211029027

11 Nelson 2020 (Candid Learning)

12 The Bridgespan Group, "Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning", 2015

13 Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). (2021). An Evaluation of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars' Civic Spring Project. Medford, MA: Author.

14 This definition of civic learning was developed by a consensus of 40+ major foundations across the country and across the political spectrum; it is being incorporated into increasingly more explanations of what the emerging civic learning field is trying to achieve. (The Civic Education Funders Workshop, Washington, D.C., Sept. 2019)

15 Astin and Vogelgesang 2006; Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison 2006; Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010; Grantmakers for Education, 2010; Meyer, 2003; Prentice and Robinson, 2010; Campus Compact, 2017.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010.

18 Gallini and Moely 2003.

19 Cress 2004.

20 Bernacki and Jaeger 2008.

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