

Community Toolkit

- Business Support for Youth Programs
- Creating an Education Program and Hiring Youth Outreach Staff
 - Creating Youth Recognition Awards/Scholarships
 - Developing a Youth Training/Leadership Program
- **Involving Young People in the Election Process**
 - Mentoring Students and Visiting Schools
 - Setting up Internship Programs
- Working with Youth to Address Specific Community Issues or Needs
 - Youth Philanthropy
- Youth on School, Municipal, and Advisory Boards / Councils

The Maine Department of Education's
Citizenship Education Task Force

and

CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS



2006

In 1971, the 26th amendment granted the right to vote to eleven and a half million 18 to 21 year-olds. In 1972, 49.6% of eighteen to twenty-four year olds eligible to vote voted. Today that number has declined dramatically. In the presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the turnout rate declined by 16 percentage points among young citizens. However, youth voting surged by 11 percentage points in 2004: youth voter turnout was highest in Minnesota (69%), Wisconsin (63%), Iowa (62%), Maine (59%), and New Hampshire (58%).

Studies indicate that voting becomes a life-long habit when it starts early. Relationships have also been made between voting and other forms of civic engagement—philanthropy, volunteering, mentoring, etc.. Although civic engagement can take many forms and be expressed in a wide variety of ways, voting is a key indicator of citizen engagement in the democratic process. It shows levels of interest, preferences for candidates and political parties, and views on the major public policy issues of the day. Voting by itself does not indicate the depth of engagement by a citizen, but it is necessary for a democracy to flourish.¹

Chapter 577, Public Laws of 2003 & Chapter 387 Public Laws of 2005

In Maine, 2006 marks the first year seventeen-year-olds are allowed to vote. A new law was recently passed in the Maine Legislature allows eligible 17-year-olds to vote for candidates (not ballot questions or bond issues) in the June 13, 2006 primary elections if they will be 18 and otherwise eligible to vote by the general election on November 7, 2006.

Chapter 577, Public Laws of 2003 “An Act to Reduce the Voting Age Qualification for State Primary Elections for Voters Who Will Reach 18 Years of Age by the Time of the General Election” was signed March 26, 2004. The June 2006 primary election will mark the first time the law is applied. This means that a 17-yr old who will be 18 by the time of the general election in November may vote on the primary ballot. Also, Chapter 387, Public Laws of 2005 “An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Political Caucuses and Committees” was signed on June 13, 2005. This allows 17-yr olds who will be 18 by the date of the next General Election to participate in party caucuses.

Maine Youth Voting Media Project 2006

Maine's Secretary of State has joined forces with media affiliates and other organizations to organize the second Youth Voting PSA Project. First implemented in 2004, the initiative is designed to draw students' attention to the importance of voting and overall civic participation. Using available technology, students will produce Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for TV and/or radio. The PSAs explore issues about voting, elections and why it's important for young people to take an interest in our democracy. Students will be able to enter their PSAs in a statewide competition. Middle school and high school entries will be judged separately.

Selected entries will be aired on television and radio stations throughout Maine and streamed. All participants will be invited to a statewide PSA showcase and press conference with state

¹ Information used in this section can be traced to the “Youth Voting” section of CIRCLE web site (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement) <http://www.civicyouth.org/>

officials in Augusta in October. The showcase will offer an opportunity for students and educators to interact with state officials and media representatives.

A Rising Tide

A Rising Tide is a leadership training seminar to help young Mainers become engaged and energized about political participation. The three day seminar teaches young adults aged 16 to 35 to run a successful grassroots campaign and encourages them to affect positive community change through volunteering. Training topics include electoral targeting, message development and media training, the effective field plan, volunteer recruitment, leadership vs. authority skills, and creating a needs-based campaign budget and timeline. The training provides students with an opportunity to meet and network with the major political players in the state and to work as a team with other civically minded young people from all walks of life and from all corners of the political spectrum. In return for ART's (A Rising Tide) campaign training and support, graduates commit to become involved in their communities by volunteering for the candidate, campaign or social cause of their choosing.

Ideas and Suggestions for Implementation

Involving young people in the election process can be very similar to how to go about mobilizing and training young leaders. See also ideas and suggestions in the Community Toolkit topic “Developing a Youth Training / Leadership Program.”

States that allow Election Day registration, on average, have youth voter turnout rates that are 14 percentage points higher, and they are more likely to be contacted by a political candidate. Three of the top five states for youth voting in 2000 allowed Election Day registration (MN, WI, ME). Other state laws that seem to increase youth voting are: early voting at convenient locations and voter registration at state motor vehicle agencies. In states that mailed sample ballots & information about polling places and extended polling place hours, youth turnout increased by about 10 percentage points.²

Some Helpful Steps Include:

→ Coalition Building

All sectors of a community need to work together to take on a task as challenging as changing the institutional reasons young people are voting less. Coalitions should seek politically diverse members with complementary capacities. For the youth voice to matter, all youth perspectives need to be heard, and Youth Vote should reflect the diversity of the target generation. Designate a Coalition Coordinator; a ‘point person’ is a necessity to a functioning coalition. Allow an appropriate coalition model to evolve locally.

→ Planning

Lack of planning can be catastrophic during an election cycle. Youth Vote Coalitions can increase their effectiveness by holding an annual planning event, planning yearly civic education activities, and incorporating specific election-related projects into annual plans. Coalition members should jointly plan election activities that will challenge the Coalition and its partners to excel. Goals should be measurable and realistic, and should recognize the capacity of Coalition members and partners. Budget issues can be overcome through transparency, open communication, and an early definition of member roles and responsibilities. Coalitions can increase their sustainability by keeping good records of meetings, agreements, plans, and procedures.

→ Use Research to Plan a Comprehensive Campaign

Use tactics research has proven to be effective—tabling, phoning, and canvassing—in the voter registration, education, and mobilization phases of a youth voter outreach campaign. Leverage resources by applying them most effectively. Use passive approaches and paid media campaigns to build name recognition, but rely on more interactive outreach methods to increase turnout. The more personalized the contact, the more it will mobilize young voters. Work with local research partners to evaluate the Coalition’s work. Maintain a

² “Youth Voter Turnout in the States During the 2004 Presidential & 2002 Midterm Elections,” CIRCLE Fact Sheet, 2005

“State by State: Youth Voter Turnout & Voter Registration Laws,” CIRCLE Map, 2004.

database of contacts made from phone and canvassing lists to re-contact youth voters and potential volunteers in the future. Plan carefully for Election Day and beyond.³

³ Carolyn Darrow, “Best Practices Handbook: Nonpartisan Guide to Voter Mobilization,” Youth Vote Coalition, 2003.

Case Study Resources

Office of the Secretary of State

Division of Elections
101 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0101
207 624-7650
cec.elections@maine.gov
<http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/>

Corey Hascall

A Rising Tide...
61 Berkshire Road
Portland, Maine 04103
207-650-2343
arisingtide@maine.rr.com

Additional Resources

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement)

Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. <http://www.civicyouth.org>

Citizenship Education Task Force

The Maine Citizenship Education Task Force is a coalition of more than 50 individuals and organizations committed to promoting and strengthening citizenship education and civic engagement across Maine. See the “for Youth” section to find out about youth voting. <http://www.mecitizenshiped.org>

Close Up Foundation

The Close Up Foundation is the nation’s largest nonprofit (501(c)(3)), nonpartisan citizenship education organization. Since its founding in 1970, Close Up has worked to promote responsible and informed participation in the democratic process through a variety of educational programs. See “Youth and Politics” for a wealth of materials and links regarding youth and politics. <http://www.closeup.org/youth.htm>

League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. <http://www.lwvme.org/>

League of Young Voters

The League of Young Voters is a national voter-organizing group out of New York City. Their mission is to engage pissed off 17-35 year olds in the democratic process to build a progressive governing majority. There are two affiliate posts in Maine: Waterville and Portland. <http://waterville.indyvoter.org/> and <http://portlandme.indyvoter.org/>

Local Government

Contact your local town government, and get information about all other counties and municipalities in Maine. <http://www.maine.gov/local/>

Maine Campus Compact

With the help of Maine Campus Compact, Maine students have joined with students around the country to mobilize and speak out on issues of importance to them: social change, community involvement, political activism, student leadership, and more. <http://www.mainecompact.org/default.html>

Maine Coalition for Peace and Justice

The Maine Coalition for Peace and Justice is a statewide organization of individual citizens and Maine group representatives working collectively and nonviolently for social equality, economic justice, direct democracy, and regenerative environmental policies. <http://www.sullboat.com/MEPJ/index.htm>

Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund

The Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund is an organization that works to preserve Maine's natural resources by encouraging citizens to participate in public policy decisions. Part of their effort includes reaching out to young people. <http://www.protectmaine.org>

Maine Equal Justice Partners

MEJP advocates on behalf of low-income people in Maine to assure their access to basic rights and services; including health care, income support, food assistance, housing, child care, education and training, and fair working conditions. They provide a voice for low-income people through representation in the courts, the Legislature, and administrative agencies; legal policy research and analysis; and education and training about their legal rights and opportunities to participate in public policy reform. <http://www.mejp.org/index.html>

Maine People's Alliance

MPA is a non-profit, multi-issue, citizen action organization with 22,000 members. MPA's purpose is to involve citizens in our democracy and to strengthen individual participation in decision-making processes that affect our lives. We are dedicated to advancing economic, environmental, political, and social justice. The organization maintains offices in Portland, Lewiston and Bangor.

<http://www.mainepeoplesalliance.org/index.htm>

Maine Political Parties

If interested in politics, search the Maine political parties: Maine Dems (<http://www.mainedems.org/>); Maine GOP (<http://www.mainegop.com/>); Maine Green-Independent party (<http://www.mainegreens.org/>).

Maine Women's Policy Center

The Maine Women's Lobby ensures that women and girls in Maine can lead healthy and productive lives free from violence and discrimination. Three leadership programs are offered: Women's Political Leadership Forum, Girl's Day at the State House, and Women's Leadership Action Coalition. The Girl's Day at the State House brings 8th grade girls to Augusta to meet the Governor, engage in mock public hearings, job shadow their legislators, and meet other girls interested in government. <http://www.mainewomen.org/>

Portland Press Herald, "Maine 17-yr-olds get voice in big races"

News article on May 31, 2006 about Maine's new law allowing 17-yr olds to vote in the primaries as long as they are 18 in time for the general election in November. <http://pressherald.maintoday.com/>

Secretary of State's Office: Democracy for Kids and Young Voters

See their site for resources for young and first-time voters, Maine's Mock Election, and state and national government resources for kids, students, parents, and teachers.

http://www.maine.gov/portal/government/edemocracy/dem_kids.html

United States Senate Youth Program

This program brings two student leaders from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity to spend a week in Washington D.C. experiencing their national government in action. Each delegate will be awarded a \$5,000 College Scholarship for undergraduate studies.

<http://hearstfdn.org/ussyp/index.html>

Youth in Government (Model State)

Youth in Government is a program of the YMCA camp of Maine. It is a leadership program that allows any High School student in Maine to participate. Students get hands on experience in how Maine's Legislative process works by spending three days in the State House, using the actual chambers, and committee rooms that the real legislature use each day. <http://www.maineypcamp.org/yig/index.php>