



33 GEN ZERS AWARDED CIVIC SPRING FELLOWSHIP TO HELP IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNITIES

PRINCETON, NJ (February 7, 2023) – Thirty-three diverse Gen Zers from five states were awarded the [Civic Spring Fellowship](#) to support their creative projects addressing important community needs. Recipients each receive a grant of \$1,800, personalized coaching, and co-learning opportunities to strengthen their project and build civic skills. The Fellowship, launched in collaboration with PayPal, is run by The Institute for Citizens & Scholars, which has been cultivating engaged citizens since 1945.

The new Fellows and their projects include:

- **Girl Talk, Female Wellness** – Phoenix high school senior Liliana Vidales will provide hygiene and sanitary products to girls and women in low-income neighborhoods.
- **History Books on Broadway** – Chicago high school senior Sophia Awuzie will make history engaging and relevant to a younger audience by writing, producing, and performing a Broadway-style show about historical topics.
- **Mental Health Awareness (MIA)** – In Tucson, Farah Mohamed, Myleigha Truitt, and Samuel Turner will provide a safe space for out-of-school youth to discuss their mental health challenges and connect with adults for guidance and support.
- **Legal Studies Institute** – Boston University freshman Jerry Chen (from Brooklyn, New York) will increase youth understanding of their legal rights, empowering them to become more actively engaged citizens.
- **Government of Youth** – High school students Naimisha Chakravadhanula and Sruti Peddi will address a lack of civics education by hosting speakers and interviews with local leaders at high schools in the Scottsdale (Arizona) area, as well a trip to City Hall or the State Capitol for Opportunity Youth.
- **Connecting the Dots** – Yale University junior Viktor Kagan will advocate for increased investment in public transportation and more effective city planning to benefit low-income residents of his hometown, Philadelphia.

The 33 young people in this class of Civic Spring Fellows are diverse in numerous ways. More than 65% of the class identify as people of color and nearly two-thirds are women. They range in age from 15 to 24 years old and come from urban, rural, and suburban areas across Arizona, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

“Today’s young people are not only eager to engage civically, they’re also particularly well suited to drive significant change,” said The Institute for Citizens & Scholars President Rajiv Vinnakota. “They’re diverse and digitally savvy, and they embody a spirit of self-empowerment and optimism that big change is possible. Civic Spring Fellows are already engaging with the urgent issues affecting us all. This opportunity will provide the additional support they need to accelerate change in their own backyard while also preparing them to be lifelong civic leaders.”

While [83 percent of young people](#) believe they have the power to change the country, many lack the resources and experience to help them effect real change. The Civic Spring Fellowship addresses this

gap by supporting young people and youth-centered organizations to make issue-specific, impactful change in their local communities. In addition to catalyzing local action in communities, the Civic Spring Fellowship aims to demonstrate the lasting value and potential of civic learning and action by young people.

Civic Spring Fellows, selected through a [competitive process](#), will work with dedicated coaches during their ten-week Fellowship. Coaches are adult mentors who will help Fellows sharpen their projects through weekly sessions. Many of the coaches come from the larger Citizens & Scholars network, including some former Civic Spring Fellows.

PayPal first sponsored the Civic Spring Fellowship in 2022 and mentored Fellows based in Maricopa County, Arizona. PayPal's sponsorship in 2023 will support Fellows from the state of Arizona as well as New York City, Chicago, Austin, and Philadelphia.

“PayPal is committed to supporting the communities where our employees live and work,” said Art Taylor, Vice President, Global Head of Compliance Investigations and PayPal Arizona Site Leader. “The Civic Spring Fellowship provides young leaders with the resources and skills to make positive change in their communities. We are proud to continue our work with the Institute for Citizens & Scholars and welcome more young people into the program.”

The new Fellows join a growing network of youth leaders driving significant change in their communities. [2022 Fellow Farhan Babur](#) spent last summer hosting voter education events in his Scottsdale, Arizona, community ahead of the midterm elections. Also in the 2022 class were a group of Philadelphia high schoolers who organized a rally on gun violence at the state capitol through Community Rising. In 2020, Fellows in Minnesota successfully fought to extend unemployment benefits to high schoolers put out of work during the pandemic.

The Civic Spring Fellowship was originally developed in 2020 by 40 subject-matter experts with insight and recommendations from young people. An [independent evaluation](#) of the 2020 Civic Spring Fellowship conducted by Tufts University's Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) confirmed the individual and community impact of the program. Key findings included that the Fellowship helped youth:

- Find or strengthen their own voice, including 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.
- Make their city or town a better place, including advocating for policy change to city leaders, securing seats for youth on local government committees, holding voter registration events, and engaging local news media.
- Gain knowledge and skills that would typically be part of a Civics class.

A complete list of the new Civic Spring Fellows, information about their projects, headshots, and coaches is available [online](#).

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About the Institute for Citizens and Scholars

[The Institute for Citizens & Scholars](#) cultivates talent, ideas, and networks that develop effective, lifelong citizens. Throughout our 75-year history, we've played a significant role in shaping educational talent in the K-12 and higher education spaces. Now, with an expanded mission, Citizens & Scholars unites the left, right, and center to develop breakthrough solutions that create stronger citizens in our country. We bring these solutions to life by forming strategic partnerships with an intentionally diverse group of young people, scholars and education leaders, and civic and business leaders—including the 27,000 world-leading Fellows in our network. Together, we're on a mission to ensure that Americans everywhere are well-informed, productively engaged for the common good, and hopeful about democracy.

About PayPal

PayPal has remained at the forefront of the digital payment revolution for more than 20 years. By leveraging technology to make financial services and commerce more convenient, affordable, and secure, the PayPal platform is empowering more than 425 million consumers and merchants in more than 200 markets to join and thrive in the global economy. For more information, visit paypal.com.

Media Contacts:

Jay Geneske | 609-356-1834 | communications@citizensandscholars.org

Meghan Gage | 708-686-5100 | mgage@paypal.com