

THE CO-CREATION GENERATION:

toolkit

a partnership between



INSTITUTE FOR
**CITIZENS &
SCHOLARS**



**Kentucky
Student
Voice Team**





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 model¹ 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.

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.

Lessons learned & recommendations

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.

Lessons learned & recommendations

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.

Lessons learned & recommendations

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

Lessons learned & recommendations

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.

lessons learned & recommendations

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.

lessons learned & recommendations

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.

Lessons learned & recommendations

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.

Lessons learned & recommendations

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.

lessons learned & recommendations

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.

lessons learned & recommendations

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 ultimate 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.

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

For more information and resources, visit our [website](#).