

# CIRCLE Growing Voters

## Mapping Your Community Ecosystem

### A Practical Guide to Start Implementing the CIRCLE Growing Voters Approach

Throughout the CIRCLE Growing Voters report, we have shared some of the key settings and institutions that have the ability to influence young people's electoral participation. While we consider them separately, these efforts may have more power if implemented in conversation and coordination with one other, bringing together multiple stakeholders, offices, and organizations. This collaborative framework is envisioned at the municipality or county level, but given the geographic diversity of the U.S., in some communities it may need to be either more focused or broader to leverage assets and reach all youth.

It's also not enough for a single organization in a community to adopt a CIRCLE Growing Voters strategy. To start, one organization may not be able to provide or improve all three elements (access, support, and culture) to all young people in a community. Or they may be able to provide only a single pathway, and not the multiple avenues to learning and participation that will engage youth with different interests, habits, and ways of learning. This makes it essential for organizations to understand both their own strengths and opportunities, as well as how they fit into their broader community ecosystem.

As an additional tool and resource in this report, which is meant to inspire and drive action, we offer this guide as a first step in bringing the CIRCLE Growing Voters framework into your work—whether you are in a government office, a political campaign, a school, a youth-led organization, or any of the countless other institutions that have a role to play. The tool will help you assess your strengths, map your community's assets and challenges, and begin to envision what a CIRCLE Growing Voters ecosystem would look like in your work.

# Mapping Existing Assets and Embracing a CIRCLE Growing Voters Strategy

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## STEP ONE: SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

What assets can you or your organization contribute to CIRCLE Growing Voters?

### CAPACITIES

- ☐ I/we see how elections have a concrete impact on my community
- ☐ I/we see why change through elections is necessary in my community
- ☐ Skills to get people motivated to participate
- ☐ Storytelling through art, music, etc.
- ☐ Knowledge of how elections run and applicable state laws
- ☐ Experience recruiting young people to do civic or political work
- ☐ Financial resources and a payroll system to compensate young leaders
- ☐ Regular communications channels that can be used to recruit or build-awareness
- ☐ Grant-writing skills
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

### RELATIONSHIPS

- ☐ A group or network of young people who are not enrolled in school
- ☐ A group or network of young people who are parents
- ☐ A group or network of young people who are in a GED program
- ☐ Another group or network of young people
- ☐ Older adults who have previously been a part of community-building efforts or advocacy change
- ☐ Youth or student groups/clubs

- ☐ An organization that has done voter engagement work or supported civic learning
- ☐ Connections to people in other neighborhoods, organizations, institutions
- ☐ An existing coalition or network that might be interested in voter engagement
- ☐ Contact at the office that runs local elections
- ☐ Contact in the education system (a teacher who has previously supported student engagement, someone at the local school who coordinates community partnerships, a local high school principal, etc.)
- ☐ People or organizations that might financially support this effort
- ☐ Someone who has experience raising funds for civic and political engagement
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

#### **SPACE, MATERIALS, AND EQUIPMENT**

- ☐ Space for network meetings
- ☐ Broadband access
- ☐ Computers or tablets
- ☐ Multimedia creation tools
- ☐ Communal kitchen
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

## 2

### STEP TWO: MAPPING THE COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE

What's already happening elsewhere? (And what isn't?) Include the perspectives of diverse young people!

#### VISIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE OPPORTUNITY:

**Which organizations (government offices, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, youth clubs/organizations, local media, etc.), individuals, or institutions in the community provide support for young people to understand and figure out how to participate in elections and voting?** What young people do they reach? Who do they miss? For instance, do election administrators conduct outreach explicitly targeted at youth in your community? Do they offer a youth poll-worker program? Do K-12 schools teach about elections and voting? When and how? Who are possible key contacts?

## SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:

**How are decisions made in your community?** What are the policies and procedures that dictate whether and how to support election participation, including bringing new voters into the electorate through programs like voter registration in schools? Are young people from a wide diversity of backgrounds invited to provide inputs or make decisions that affect the community, especially with regards to voting and elections? In what ways?

## MEANINGFUL TRADITIONS & CULTURE

**How are young people generally encouraged to participate?** Are there people and networks who consistently talk with young people about voting and participation? Are there any stories, traditions, or habits of people or places in your community that promote increased election participation? If so, which young people are exposed to them? Does your community offer free spaces where young people have voice and opportunities to interact with others—such as older residents, people their age from different backgrounds—with relatively little power hierarchy? Who has access to these opportunities and who does not? What are the spaces (physical settings, online, etc.) or people in your community that provide young people with the opportunity to think about how elections connect to their everyday lives?

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**STEP THREE: ASSESS IF IT'S ACCESSIBLE, MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE**

Use the information collected in step one, as well as community-level data on youth participation, to determine the assets and challenges to more equitable youth access to learning about elections and voting. CIRCLE's data tool, [Youth Voting and Civic Engagement](#) in America, has county-level information on youth voter turnout, and our [RAYSE Index](#) allows for identifying broad assets and challenges by county and comparing to nearby communities.

- How is opportunity distributed across a community? Are there some young people who likely see a lot of opportunity, infrastructure, and support, and others who may not? Are there dynamics that create inequitable access? If you aren't sure, what's a step you could take to find out more?
- In what ways are young people informing or leading efforts? What are the benefits and drawbacks to how young people are currently involved or not?
- What has been sustainable and happens regularly? What has not? Who is included in what happens regularly and who is not?

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### STEP FOUR: WHO HAVEN'T YOU HEARD FROM?

Review the information you've gathered so far and, crucially, who has played a role in shaping what you know. Who haven't you heard input from? Are there specific groups or neighborhoods that are underrepresented? If so, redouble your efforts to speak to those whose voices and experiences you have not incorporated. Work through leaders, organizations, or other stakeholders that have existing relationships with the communities you are trying to reach and be patient with those who may be skeptical because they have been ignored or excluded in the past.

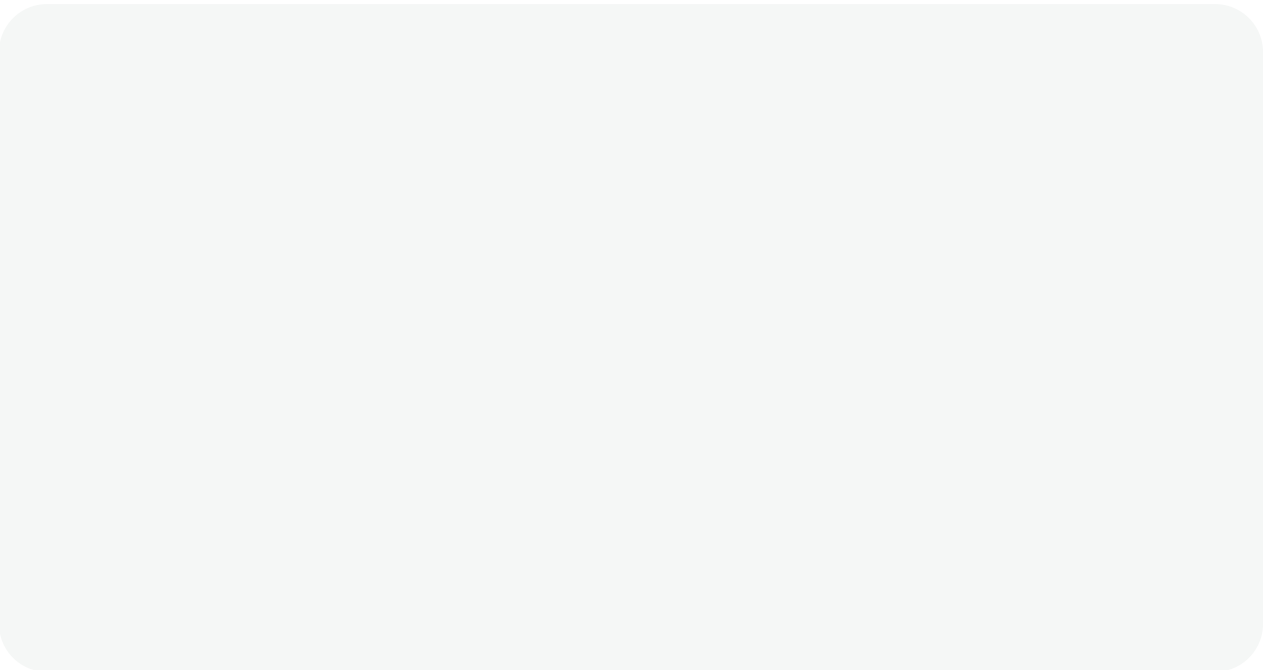


## 5

**STEP FIVE: BUILDING SUPPORT AND A PLAN**

Share your findings with a gathering of stakeholders that came up in Step 2. You can use the Community Discussion Guide offered as one of the supplemental resources to this report to introduce partners to CIRCLE Growing Voters. Reflect on what works well to reach a wide diversity of young people, where there are differences in accessibility, and discuss ideas for addressing them. Which stakeholders have resources to help address disparities and who can be supportive? What are the roles for young people?

As an optional but useful step, involved organizations and people can conduct the self-assessment in Step 1. When multiple organizations' responses are combined, they can give the group a comprehensive map of the community's wealth which goes well beyond financial resources. Once assets are identified, stakeholders can review shared goals and match skills and assets with objectives and potential projects to develop a plan for your community.



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**STEP SIX: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN!**

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**STEP SEVEN: WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

What worked and what didn't to involve young people from marginalized communities? What should be continued?

We'd love to know what you did and what you learned! Reach out to us at [@civicyouth](https://twitter.com/civicyouth) or [circle@tufts.edu](mailto:circle@tufts.edu).



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