

Civic Engagement & Service

Many of today's students are becoming more civically engaged. Case in point: during the 2008 U.S. primaries and caucuses, over 6.5 million young people under 30 participated. This turnout marked a dramatic increase from 9% in the 2000 primaries to 17% in 2008, according to statistics from The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE). And if trends continue on this path—with 40% of youth voters voting in the 2000 presidential election and 49% in the 2004 election—this will be the first time since 18-to-20-year-olds were allowed to vote that youth turnout has increased three election cycles in a row! Wow.

Engaging Civically

What are some ways that you and your fellow group members can engage civically? Consider...

- campaigning for a local or national political candidate
- championing a local cause, such as keeping art and music in the middle school curriculum
- holding a fundraiser to help save a local historical building
- hosting a voter registration drive

Look at You!

Among 18-to-29-year-olds, 38% watch candidate debates, while 36% of 30-to-49-year-olds do so, says a September 2007 Pew Research Center survey.

Civic Reflection

According to the Projects on Civic Reflection (www.civicreflection.org/), civic reflection “is the practice of reading and discussing short pieces of literature as a means of reflecting on the central questions of civic life.” This practice is being used by different types of organizations to help participants think, talk, and respond to their communities’ needs. Check it out!

Whether you work on an initiative as a group or you decide to take on a civic cause independently, the *fact that you act* is something to be applauded.

“There's a big difference between seeing an opportunity and seizing an opportunity.”

~ Jim Moore

Service Learning

In 1989, 66% of college freshmen volunteered during their last year of high school. In 2007, that number rose to 83.3%, according to a survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Yes, some high schools require community service as a graduation requirement, yet in this study, 70% of those who reported volunteering weren't required to pitch in.

Service is on the upswing, as students find causes to champion through their actions. The Internet has been a big help with Facebook groups rallying students to fight global warming, protest events, and more. *USA Today* (3/13/08) reported that over 22,000 non-profits have signed up on MySpace to gather supporters since the site debuted in 2004.

You've likely seen this service in action through alternative Spring Break trips to do service, such as the Pay It Forward tours launched by four University of Minnesota freshmen, and campus-specific efforts. Plus there are multiple groups—like the student anti-genocide coalition, STAND, which is present at 800 colleges and high schools—that have homes on various campuses.

Service learning is a way to provide service to the community while also providing a tangible learning experience to those involved. According to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, service learning:

- Is where students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities
- Is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and the community
- Helps foster civic responsibility