



Youth Civic Engagement Matters Embracing Citizenship in Urban Areas

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Introduction

Civic engagement refers to multiple ways that youth identify with the common good and become engaged members of their communities (Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Civic engagement through 4-H helps empower young people to be well informed citizens who are engaged in their community and the world. Being involved in civic activities, youth can learn about community affairs, build decision-making skills, gain civic literacy skills and even gain confidence and understanding in order to make positive connections and relationships within their community. 4-H Civic engagement is focused on three specific program areas which include:

- **Leadership and Personal Development** – focuses on engaging youth in their communities through programs and organizations with opportunities to share their voice
- **Community Action** – focuses on youth giving back to their community, learning life skills and creating solutions to problems in their community
- **Communication and Expressive Arts** – focuses on youth learning creative thinking, writing and building their communication skills through visual arts programs

Background

While 4-H civic engagement programming provides benefits for all youth, 4-H urban youth and communities are often absent from programming efforts. One main reason is due to the challenges urban 4-H educators face in incorporating activities within their communities. Many of which are

beyond their control and have to do more with social and economic constraints found in urban communities. Participation in civic engagement can help youth address community issues while also enhancing educational and social skills. Programs in urban areas can bring attention to often forgotten or hard to reach communities where youth are in dire need of supportive programming. According to the NAE4-HA Urban Task Force Programs Committee, urban 4-H programming focuses mainly on childcare, literacy and collaboration. Thus, supporting the need to provide other types of programs that offer youth ways to positively engage within their communities and build personal character, such as social empathy and emotional empathy.



Key Terms

Civic Engagement – an approach that encompasses individuals getting involved and addressing public issues in their community (Delano-Oriaran, 2015).
<https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul101.pdf>

Civic Literacy – refers to the understanding of basic knowledge of American government processes and the political process (Hylton, 2018).

Social Empathy – the social responsibility to understand other people’s life experiences that involve recognizing social injustice or change processes (Hylton, 2018).

Emotional Empathy – when a person can readily understand and feel other people’s emotions (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015).

Tips to Implement Civic Engagement Programs for Urban Youth

Strategies to increase participation in 4-H civic engagement among youth in urban areas:

Youth-led community improvement projects in areas that need beautification and gentrification agendas (i.e., urban citizen gardener, neighborhood walks and discussion)

Government intern programs and clubs for youth to have more voice in their community

Collaboration with non-profits/civic groups/churches (i.e., NAACP, fraternities and sororities)

Cultural relevance programs and movements (i.e., Black Lives Matter, etc.)

Partnerships with public health care services to help youth explore child health and improve marketing of programs in their area (i.e., <http://www.pccy.org/take-action/things-you-can-do/>)

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