YOUTH-DRIVEN STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE LATINX YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Latinx youth's individual civic actions are shaped by a range of contexts, including their friends, homes, schools, communities, and the broader society. These contexts both encourage and present challenges for youth's civic engagement.

Strategies to expand Latinx youth civic engagement should take into account ways in which young people's lives – and therefore their civic engagement – are influenced by each of these contexts.

Based on focus groups with 108 Latinx youth in Houston and Denver, facilitated by 8 youth research team members in each city, young people ages 14-18 identified specific strategies to expand civic engagement within each of eight distinct contexts in their lives: individual (themselves), peers, families, schools, community/neighborhood, the sociocultural context, the economic context, and the political context.

Specific youth-driven strategies to expand civic engagement are outlined within each of these aspects of youth's lives. Some common themes emerged across contexts, suggesting the need for multi-level strategies that work across the distinct contexts of young people's lives.

These include:

- **Accessible, culturally-grounded information, targeted to both youth and their families,** about current issues and ways Latinx youth can get involved
- **Positive messaging and modeling specifically about ways Latinx youth are involved** in impactful ways, targeted to youth and their families
- **Safe spaces for discussing and participating in civic activities,** addressing fears felt by both youth and their families
- **Youth-led spaces** that encourage peer-to-peer communication, shared civic experiences
- **Reducing barriers to participation,** in such ways as offering transportation, eliminating GPA requirements, providing no-cost programming, making free food available

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The following insights were shared by Latinx youth.

INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Create safe environments for young people

• Show support for youth; provide protective spaces for engagement, where youth don't need to feel scared
• Create teen-relatable places where youth who have similar interests can go; spaces that focus on problems identified by youth, rather than adults
• Offer youth-focused programs that specifically serve youth of color

"Change happens when people get angry or lose hope...and so, people are getting angry. So, as long as they know that there's a safe space where people just like them want the same thing, they'll come together for sure. They just need to know that a place, a safe place exists...What happens to a lot of Latino kids is that we have a lot of responsibilities with our families...So long as they know that there's a safe place that they don't consistently have to go to, when they want to they can go to, it for sure will grow."

Increase youth's civic knowledge

• Utilize technology to share personal stories that help youth see how they are affected by various issues and how change can be beneficial
• Inform youth about specific ways to get involved around issues they care about; demonstrate specific ways involvement can have impact
• Increase awareness of existing programs that enable youth to have their voices heard
• Explain youth's rights in order to counter fears (especially around immigration) that keep youth from participating

"But, if I, like, saw and I heard people's stories and how it affects them, then I want to get involved more, if it was something more personal."

"Because a lot of [young people] said they weren't, like, coming to these type of things or... to speak about issues, like, because they're scared that, like, "oh, I'm going to get deported," or something. So, I think, like, if you let them become aware, like, "oh, you have these rights. So, they can't do this to you. So, you shouldn't be afraid to go to this place and to, you know, like protest or volunteer and do these kind of things"

Provide positive messages around engagement

• Create messages that focus on youth's civic duty, emphasizing the impact of their involvement
• Promote youth's ability to make change, to make a difference, to have voice
• Treat youth seriously, so they know their voices will be heard

"So, how is it that we're supposed to make these decisions? It's, like, bouncing back and forth between adult and not adult. If we could be treated a little bit more seriously, I feel like more people would come out, knowing that they'll be heard."

PEER-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Communicate civic information directly to youth

- Facilitate spaces where Latinx youth can share with each other that young people can make change, that they have power both individually and together
- Facilitate in-person, peer-to-peer opportunities where youth can share information about issues about which they are passionate, hear personal stories from each other about successes, and can be involved alongside other youth
- Help young people learn how and where to start getting involved; break down specifically the power they have and the kinds of actions they might take
- Help provide Latinx youth with a sense of security, by informing them about specific ways they can get involved that do not put themselves or their families at risk

"Whenever I would [do] some presentations like in class, I would be like, "look at what this does, did you know this?" and they're like, "no," and they have like this ugly face on and they're just like, "what the heck!?" and they're super shocked...then they leave the classroom with the same face and I'm like, "I got them thinking, you know?" So, like, maybe show them the ugly, you know? And then, like, you can show them... you can make it better!"

Facilitate shared peer civic experiences

- Facilitate opportunities for peers to sit with each other and inform each other about civic engagement, share knowledge and experiences, encourage each others' participation
- Create supportive spaces, where youth can support each other and feel that they are not alone in taking action

"And, we started having more meetings... and I would attend because I was interested and since I've got interested and some of my friends, "what are you doing? Why?" So, I guess they came interested to what I was doing. I told them about it and I guess that's why they got in it. That's how my other friends got to go to DC. ...So, I guess if somebody's curious or wants to join, you have to sit down with them and actually talk about it, give out details."

FAMILY-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Adopt a family-based approach that encourages support between young people and parents

- To help parents be more comfortable encouraging and supporting their children's involvement, create family-friendly communications that help them understand civic engagement opportunities
- Help parents see their children have voice and can be a part of making change
- Create and implement efforts to bring parents on board: Share with parents that their children's involvement in civic activities is positive, encourage pride in their children's engagement, inform parents about the impact youth's actions can have and that their children are not at risk when they engage in civic activity

"I think we should also spend some time trying to make sure that the parents understand that they are not... when they go to protest and when they speak up for their community, that they're not at risk... because of the news, there might be shootings and stuff like that and accidents happen. And, I feel like many students rely on their parents' permission to go to these things. So, I think, try to make sure the parents understand and allow them to go and that would also allow us to be more involved, as well as bring the parents in."

Use simple, clear, accessible communications

- Provide Spanish-language explanations of civic engagement opportunities, so that Spanish-speaking parents understand and provide permission for youth to participate
- Directly address parental fears: Communicate directly and clearly with parents that their children will not be at risk when they engage in civic activities
- Facilitate parent-to-parent outreach: Create opportunities for parents that understand civic activity to inform other parents about it, ultimately enabling more youth participation

"Okay, not a lot of people in, like, this program have English and Spanish explanations of what they're doing. So, if we could just increase the Spanish versions so the only-Spanish-speaking parents understand what's going on because if they don't know they're not letting their child go."

"I think that getting the parents informed... for example, in my case, when it comes to politics my parents are very much, like, scared. I guess it's a topic we don't really discuss a lot because ...just a lot of different opinions and discussions. And, I feel like if other adults that knew more about this reached out to parents like mine ... just inform parents and then parents would be more involved, which therefore could go to the students as well or, like, their children, which would get just a lot of people more involved."

SCHOOL-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Adopt school cultures that promote safe school spaces for engagement

• Motivate civic engagement in schools, e.g. by informing youth about opportunities for involvement, holding conversations about current issues and ways students can get involved, building awareness of students' rights to get involved in civic activities
• Encourage student civic engagement by facilitating classroom-based civic activities and supporting students to use their own voices for civic action
• Support student-led programming where students can choose issues to focus on, organize, and build a sense of community; reduce barriers that keep students from participating in clubs and other civic activities at school, like GPA requirements

"We should have like conversation here at school at least once a month. … Let's talk about something that is going on. "We want to know how you're doing. We want to know, do you want to do something about it? Do you want to do something as a whole as a school? Protest? Do you want us to do community service?" It's like helpful because maybe that … if everyone at the school are, like, motivated and are doing something then they'll be, like "ok, let's go. Might as well." So like it's a party, a 15th party. If everyone at school is going, obviously most of the people are gonna be, like, "oh, so like let's go, my friends are there, all my friends are there." So if it's the same thing, like, for the school, like, if the principal and all the teachers… let's all go to this protest… let's help the undocumented. Let's help those kids who are separated from their parents and in foster home." I feel that would be motivated to help out and forget about… Grades are important but I feel like in this aspect it's, like, let's help out the community first."

Discuss current issues, diverse ways youth can engage and voter registration and education

• Discuss current events and civic engagement opportunities in school assemblies and classes, so youth can learn about ways to become involved; incorporate Latino youth who share their stories of involvement; follow up with actions that include principal, teachers
• Encourage students to register and vote; inform Latinx youth about the impact of their vote and how their individual actions can come together to make a difference
• Provide students with step-by-step tutorials that show them what they can do and what they should know; e.g., tie specific civics knowledge to real world impacts
• Support school clubs that teach students about current issues and how to unite together to collectively address these issues

"Yes, a little course on it. Like, maybe you should refresh on, like, the branches of government and then, like… maybe we can talk about, like… let's say there's certain laws that, like, target, like, minorities or whatever. You could be, like, "hey, you see this law? You could have prevented it by voting this guy out" or whatever. Or, just like educating them on, like politics… just making it known to them because, like, I was saying with my sisters, they didn't vote because they didn't care because they didn't know and, like, if people know I feel like people would… try to change, try to strive for more of a change…. Like, it's like these step by step tutorials… like, a leadership workshop or whatever. And, it's, like, what you can do, what you should know, and then, like, the product is yours to make, you know? And then, like, I think that's, like, something schools should emphasize more on."

COMMUNITY/NEIGHBORHOOD-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Provide opportunities for youth community engagement

- Promote specific opportunities where youth can increase awareness about what's going on in their community, learn what they can do to impact change, and become involved in making viable community change
- Encourage involvement in youth-focused ways: provide transportation to activities; ask young people to tell friends about upcoming civic engagement opportunities; tell youth how an opportunity benefits them; publicize opportunities for youth engagement in appealing, not intimidating, ways

"I guess if someone came up to me with like an actual way that something could change then maybe I would go forward with it. If they actually said look I have this open door where this opportunity could happen but you know you have to be here on this certain day to talk or something then maybe."

"I guess like publishing it in a way... where like you're saying, like, "we're gonna be in a room, like with, with senators talking about this," like I feel like it feels some sort of...yeah, scary... boring. But, if you are, like, "hey we're gonna go have a picnic, you know, have a walk. We're gonna go to an art museum and... interesting." I like the idea where, like, in the emails it said to tell all your friends. That's one way I actually found out."

Adopt a community-focused approach

- Expand the presence of organizations that enable Latinos to recruit and support other Latinos in making change; strengthen consistency in how organizations relate to youth and the community, including committing to sticking with specific change efforts
- Conduct direct outreach to youth via programs grounded in local communities that enable and support youth leadership

"To see that they have effort. That they are willing to try and make those changes to stay in that one spot and not try to change it all. ...them constantly working with us or like volunteers helping out or something you know, I don't know. To see the consistency to see that they actually mean it that they actually want to help us do something."

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Engage all youth in civic engagement

• Bring youth together: Bring together youth of all races in seeking to make change; promote civic opportunities to both high school and middle school students; ask youth to encourage others to join by spreading the word about their civic involvement
• Don't seek to change young people's minds; instead, show youth opportunities to get involved, how they can make change together, that their vote has an impact
• Treat youth seriously, let them know that their voices are being heard; survey youth who do not participate to find out why not
• Explicitly inform youth that immigration status doesn't affect their ability to be involved in making change

"Having support from other races too because I feel like if you want the Latinx community to be involved, like… I wouldn't want, like, African American community to be like, "Oh, they're just a bunch of Mexicans who just want rights in America even though they don't belong here." or something, basically, like, support from other races…"

Share accessible information via media

• Promote organizations that engage youth in civic activities
• Utilize social media, group chats to get the word out about ways youth can get involved in trying to make change, how becoming involved matters, how their actions can impact their own lives
• Use social media, videos, TV shows to build young people's awareness about current issues (e.g., immigration, mental health) and to demonstrate how others fight for these issues

"We use a lot of social media and maybe we can use that as a reference to show all the situations that are going on. Like, maybe someone can do a YouTube video of immigration, to show how they really fight for their rights and that they're not just here to be lazy. And for mental health – they also had a TV show last year… people were actually trying to fight it, and I think we need more of that in this world, because we need to get the word out that it's not just immigration, depression. It can be anything else."

ECONOMIC & POLITICAL CONTEXT-FOCUSED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LATINX YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Address economic barriers by reducing economic costs to engagement

• Offer clubs to youth that have no cost to join or participate, provide free food
• Provide transportation so young people can get involved, as parents work long hours and don't have money for transportation
• Provide financial incentives for youth who participate in civic activities

"Maybe, like, no money involved, … I think when there's money involved, like, since a lot of, like, Latino and Black kids are poor they, like, you know. So when there's, like, no one there's no money involved it's more likely for them to be involved if that were thing. And also when there's free food."

Build supportive political communities

• Create inclusive organizations that bring people of all races together to make change