

Facilitator/Instructor Guide to Implementation of the Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment

Working with High School Youth

The following facts are from CIRCLE, The Community Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement:

Community Involvement

The majority of non-college youth (nearly 60%) do not feel they can make a difference in their communities, compared to only about 40% of college-attending youth.

Non-college youth are less likely to have volunteered (by 20 percentage points) than college-attending youth.

Source: Civic Engagement Among Non-College Attending 18-25 Year Olds By Mark Hugo Lopez and Jason P. Kolaczowski, February 2003, CIRCLE

Factors that Set 15-25 year-olds (“DotNets”) Apart

- **Disengaged**: More than half of the DotNets (57%) are completely disengaged from civic life.
- **Disconnected**: Only 24% of DotNets claim to follow government and public affairs "very often," compared to 60% of Matures, 50% of Baby Boomers, and 37% of GenXers.
- **Distrust People**: Seventy percent of DotNets agree that "Most people look out for themselves," and 56% agree that "Most people would take advantage of you."
- **Do Not Embrace Citizen Responsibility**: Only 38% of DotNets say that citizenship entails special obligations; 58% say simply being a good person is enough. This is markedly different than the responses provided by GenXers (48% special obligations, 48% being a good person enough); Baby Boomers (60%, 34 %); and Matures (59%, 32%).
- **Pro-Government**: Large majorities of DotNets agree with the statements "Government should do more to solve problems"

(64%), "Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest" (65%), and "Government often does a better job than people give it credit for" (65%). These responses are significantly higher than the responses given by GenX (51%, 60%, 49% respectively), Boomers (43%, 54%, 50%), and Matures (38%, 53%, 44%).

The Distinct DotNets - A Paradox

"This research reveals a real paradox in the civic attitudes of the DotNets," said William Galston, Director of CIRCLE. "The youngest generation is more favorable toward government action and more socially tolerant than older generations, yet they are also less attentive to public affairs, less involved in politics, and less trustful of others."

Source: The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait by Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins; September 19, 2002; CIRCLE

Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Project

To help reverse some of the trends discussed above, we would like to invite area youth to participate in a very important community assessment project. Their voices and input are essential for the project to ultimately be successful.

The University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government is working with a group of community leaders in the Columbus area. The committee members represent education, not for profit organizations, foundations, businesses and government. The purpose of the project is to conduct a broad-based, community needs assessment of the entire Chattahoochee Valley area. The area includes Muscogee, Harris, Talbot, Taylor, Marion, Stewart and Chattahoochee Counties in Georgia, and Russell County in Alabama. Government classes from high schools representing all eight counties are participating in this project.

UGA is working with the committee to collect information from a wide variety of sources, including:

- Demographic and economic data
- Review of existing studies
- town hall public meetings in each county
- one-on-one interviews
- regional townhall meeting

- focus groups, including youth
- random telephone survey of all 8 counties
- homeless survey

The results will provide the basis for a comprehensive assessment of the needs, gaps, and overlaps in services in the entire eight county region. The assessment will seek to identify and clarify the human services needs of each county and the region and identify any gaps (or overlaps) that exist between the needs of the communities and the resources that are available to meet them.

The study will be completed in early 2005, and we need your help to ensure that youth voices in the area are included in this assessment! While we have had several high school age youth attend town hall meetings and have met with several young people for one-on-one interviews, the committee would like to include a broader voice from this important part of the community.

Instructions for Class “Townhall” Session

Tools needed: Students will need paper and pen/pencil. A chalkboard or whiteboard. Blank sheets of paper.

The questions included with this packet mimic those that were used in community town hall meetings in each county, so students will be responding to the same issues as their parents and others in the community. These questions are:

1. What are the greatest strengths of _____ County (the county where the student is from)?
2. What are the greatest challenges of _____ County?
3. Are there any gaps in services in the County? (These would include the need for after school recreational programs, for example, where no one is filling the need.)
4. Are there any overlaps in services in the County? (Is more than one group providing services, or are there efficiencies that could be created by groups working together?)

Prior to asking the first question, divide the students into groups of four or five, and ask them to sit in a group together. All students should stay in the room for small group discussion. (Asking them to number off will ensure students do not necessarily sit with just friends. In classes with several home counties represented, students may want to group together by home county.)

Provide students with the first question only, and ask them to take a few minutes individually (without group discussion) to write their initial thoughts. One way to do this would be to ask them to write their three top responses to this question.

After a few minutes, ask them to discuss the question as a group and arrive at the group's top three answers to the question. Encourage creative discussion, and tell them not to worry if their group's ideas overlap with another group's. When they are finished, one member of each group should write that group's three responses on the board. After all groups have responded, the facilitator/instructor should read through each idea, asking for clarification or thoughts on every few ideas. This can be an additional opportunity to share ideas across the class. (A typical class period will not usually allow for extensive discussion, unless a teacher chooses to use two class periods instead of just one.) One person, either the facilitator or a class member, should copy the results from the board before the class moves onto the next question.

Repeat the process for each question. Questions 3 and 4 can be combined if time is running short.

At the end, compile the results for all questions, and give students an opportunity to anonymously submit ideas they were not comfortable discussing in the broader group. These ideas should be included with the summary from the class. Please identify the class on the summary and e-mail or send the summary and any anonymous ideas to:

Candyss Bryant, Chair – candyssbryant@aol.com OR

Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Committee
c/o United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley
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Columbus, GA 31901
(706) 718-9520

Following the Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Project

Several opportunities are available to students and/or parents who desire to follow the project.

- A point in time homeless survey will be conducted in all 8 counties during the last week of January, 2005. Volunteers interested in this project can contact Candyss Bryant, Chair of the Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Committee at the number included above.
- The project report will be completed in the early spring of 2005. Results will be publicly available, and interested teachers and/or students can obtain a copy by contacting Ms. Bryant.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for your efforts to engage your students in this important community project. Please feel free to contact Ms. Bryant if you have any questions or would like any additional information about the project.