

ROCKING THE NUMBERS: CIRCLE'S PLACE IN THE YOUTH VOTING MOVEMENT

BY: HEATHER SMITH, PRESIDENT OF ROCK THE VOTE

Over the past decade, CIRCLE has been an incredibly valuable part of the youth voting community, providing trusted, high-quality data and analysis on youth voting and civic participation overall.

CIRCLE has helped many youth organizations to use data and research to understand their audience and to tell the story of young people's engagement in a compelling way. Its research has academic rigor, but it also has real world implications; it answers questions that are on the minds of those of us working in the youth civic engagement field, improving our work in ways that cannot be overstated.

In 2008, more young people cast a ballot than in any other previous US election, and the headlines read: "The Year of the Youth Vote." Barack Obama received credit for this surge in young voters, which he deserved, as he took the chance and invested significant time and resources in reaching out to and engaging young people in meaningful ways. But there was more at play in 2008 – for nearly a decade, youth organizations had been testing voter contact tactics, developing coordinated messages, sharing best practices and building a model to increase young voter participation.

The 2008 elections were the third major election cycle in a row when young voter turnout went up, in part because there was a new, engaged generation entering the electorate, there were candidates paying attention to their issues and asking for their votes, and there were organizations working together to understand this generation and how to best engage them.

CIRCLE's work, both analyzing and quantifying the levels of civic participation of young people and identifying opportunities for improvement, made these efforts by the youth organizations possible.

"CIRCLE is an invaluable resource for 'the facts' on youth civic engagement. I regularly point students and reporters to the CIRCLE website for information on civic activity among young people. I would also say that the research sponsored and publicized by CIRCLE is invaluable."

—DAVID CAMPBELL, JOHN CARDINAL O'HARA, CSC
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, DIRECTOR, ROONEY CENTER FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

"CIRCLE is the most trusted, relied on and authoritative source in the field."

—TED MCCONNELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS

And the work of CIRCLE continues to push us all forward. CIRCLE's insight into the shifting demographics of the Millennial generation, which young people are participating, and who is being left behind helps us all to be more effective. Programs that reach the most disengaged communities have been furthered or developed in response to their research. And efforts to remove the barriers to participation - especially the lack of quality civic education in high schools and the constraints that outdated election processes have on access and turnout - have been strengthened by the research CIRCLE has done to identify these barriers and the impact of potential solutions.

Continued on Page 13



Continued from Page 12

And while CIRCLE is a resource on civic engagement broadly, it is during big election cycles that my organization, Rock the Vote, works most closely with them. As we head into the 2012 election cycle, I already have all of the CIRCLE voter turnout papers and fact sheets taped to my wall for easy reference, I have their phone number on speed dial for questions related to Census figures or other data analysis needed for media interviews and presentations, and I look forward to CIRCLE's input on new, measurable ideas to further civic engagement that we will test in the coming year.

CIRCLE'S INSIGHT INTO THE SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION, WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PARTICIPATING, AND WHO IS BEING LEFT BEHIND HELPS US ALL TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE.

As I look ahead to the work that will be done to further the engagement of young Americans in our communities and our democracy, I know it will be more meaningful because CIRCLE will be involved. So, thank you to everyone at CIRCLE for your work, congratulations on your tenth anniversary, and I look forward to what the next decade will bring. ★

"CIRCLE is the first place I look when looking for information on youth civic engagement. Your leadership has helped the youth field (and media) understand our constituency better and focus our work."

—DAVID B. SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

"CIRCLE is the go-to place for anyone (teachers, practitioners, journalists, scholars, citizens) interested in the most current and accurate information about young people and civic engagement. Organized, accurate, timely. Widely recognized and respected."

—CONSTANCE FLANAGAN, PROFESSOR, U. OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

