

2017-18

**GENERATION
CITIZEN POLICY
AND ADVOCACY
AGENDA**



ABOUT OUR POLICY AND ADVOCACY AGENDA

Generation Citizen’s (GC) policy and advocacy agenda describes our approach to prioritizing Action Civics in federal, state, and district-level policies, laws, education standards, and programming. Our agenda is not intended to serve as a definitive statement to be applied in all communities. Instead, the agenda is an outline of our policy positions for promoting essential components of Action Civics policy. These essential components include the prioritization of student-voice, project-based learning, civic knowledge, and targeted youth engagement with local government.

The policy and advocacy agenda reviews GC’s Action Civics policy and advocacy positions at the federal, state, and district levels. Based on our recently passed strategic plan, GC has determined that state-level advocacy efforts present the best opportunity to create favorable conditions for the implementation of Action Civics. This state-level focus includes both influencing state-level legislation, and working with State Departments of Education and other key players to create positive conditions for schools to engage in the practice. While policy change at all levels is necessary to create favorable conditions for Action Civics, we will focus our own advocacy efforts and resources primarily at the state-level.

FEDERAL, STATE, AND DISTRICT POLICY POSITIONS

FEDERAL POLICY

Federal education policy establishes key financial incentives, important learning objectives, and the overall legal framework in which states and districts operate. GC supports the following federal education policy reforms:

FULLY FUND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION’S CIVICS GRANT PROGRAMS

PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ACADEMIES FOR AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVICS PROGRAM

- » The Academies grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement, supports Presidential and Congressional Academies for Teachers of American History and Civics in order to provide targeted support for both teachers and high school students in history and civics.
- » This program is currently funded at \$1.8 million, allocated between the programs. It should be fully funded at the ESSA authorized amount of \$1.815 million for each program, which amounts to \$3.6 million in total funding.

AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVICS-NATIONAL ACTIVITIES GRANTS

- » The American History and Civics Education—National Activities is a grant program which supports “programs that promote innovation in instruction, learning strategies, and professional development, civics and government” focusing particularly on “low-income students and underserved populations.”
- » This grant is currently being funded at \$1.7 million. It should be fully funded at the ESSA authorized amount of \$4.6 million.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS

- » The Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grants allow school districts to apply for funding from the state for the purposes of a well-rounded education which can include civics education.

- » This grant is currently funded at \$400 million. It should be fully funded at the ESSA authorized amount of \$1.6 billion.

FUND THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

- » The Corporation for National and Community Service and its flagship initiative—the AmeriCorps programs—are pillars of America’s nonprofit sector. AmeriCorps’ various initiatives contribute talent and creativity to organizations across the country.
- » Generation Citizen has successfully worked with AmeriCorps VISTA corps members to increase organizational capacity in recent years. Current federal funding for The Corporation for National and Community Service is \$1.03 billion, representing a nearly \$6.5 million decrease from FY16. Funding levels should meet and exceed the previous year’s levels. This funding would help both Generation Citizen, and the Action Civics field at large.

STATE POLICY

State-level education policy sets the foundational approach for curricular standards, holistic development and support of teachers, and the assessment of classroom practices. GC will prioritize our own work on state-level policies as the primary way to expand the implementation of Action Civics. We do so through advocating for states to focus on curriculum standards, funding, and assessments:

ESTABLISH CURRICULAR STANDARDS THAT PRIORITIZE CIVIC KNOWLEDGE AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

- » A civics education course should be required in state law, standards and curriculum frameworks, particularly for middle and high school students. The content of this effective civics course may include: the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; opportunities for citizen participation in the various branches and levels of government; separation of powers; and a working knowledge of intergovernmental affairs.
- » Standards must incentivize student-led inquiry and project-based learning. This includes students analyzing classroom-identified challenges, and engaging in problem-solving strategies. Students should be required to complete a student-led civics project (synonymous to an Action Civics project) in which they take political action towards lasting change on a real-world issue in their community. This project should consist of the following components: community examination, issue identification, research, strategizing, taking action, and reflection. All of these elements are foundational to an effective Action Civics education.
- » Civic learning should be integrated within all academic disciplines. A well-rounded education prioritizes civic learning across every academic discipline—from math and science to language arts and physical education.

CREATE A SUSTAINABLE CIVICS PROJECT FUND

- » States should establish a Civic Project Fund (potentially through a private-public partnership) to support educators in promoting and implementing effective civic learning and associated requirements. The Fund should be used to support teacher professional development and school implementation of effective Action Civics modules. This includes funding districts to support curriculum development and professional development, support for the implementation of student-led civics projects, and providing central capacity for standards, frameworks, and professional development.

IMPLEMENT STRONG CIVIC ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES TIED TO STANDARDS

- » Assessment of student progress toward civics education outcomes should be an essential part of state

strategy to implement ESSA’s definition of a “well-rounded education”.

- » States should develop and implement effective assessment for student-led civics projects and incorporate results into student outcome metrics.
- » States should institute a public designation for civics education and civically engaged districts and/ or schools. This could include a tiered ranking system (excellent, average, or poor), or a requirement that all schools/ districts achieve a basic baseline and receive a civics distinction/ badge. Notably, accountability indicators might include consequences—potentially including improvement plans with timelines and action steps—for districts and schools whose practice diverges from accountability indicators.

DISTRICT POLICY

District-level policy provides principals and teachers with the support needed to institute effective civic learning practices and environments within schools and classrooms. School districts can help ensure that that state and federal policies are effectively implemented. Additionally, innovation in civics education often takes place at the district level. GC’s advocacy for Action Civics entails the following district-level priorities:

PRIORITIZE ACTION CIVICS IN SCHOOL DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENTS AND STRATEGIC PLANS

- » School districts should include and prioritize civic and community readiness in the design of their strategic plans. These priorities should identify Action Civics as a key strategy and be attached to student assessments, and accountability metrics.

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO CREATE A COALITION FOR ACTION CIVICS

- » School districts should engage with local community groups and organizations in order to successfully implement Action Civics. Such engagement includes public-private partnerships to fund professional development for teachers, opportunities for student voice in the implementation of Action Civics, and the formation of a cross-sector coalition to institutionalize Action Civics in state-level legislation or administrative policy.

APPLY FOR SSAE GRANTS FROM STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES

- » School districts should apply for Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grants from the state, as part of Title IV of ESSA. These funds can be used in three areas: 1) providing a well-rounded education (which includes civics), 2) using technology to support student learning, and 3) supporting student safety/health. School districts should apply for grants that include civics education as a way to prioritize a well-rounded education for students.

OFFER ROBUST TRAINING AND RESOURCES TO EDUCATORS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION CIVICS

- » Professional development focused on Action Civics should be provided to all teachers in middle and high schools, with a focus on social studies educators. Minimally, professional development trainings should support teachers as civic educators to plan and implement effective student-led civics projects. In addition to training, school districts should provide teachers with resources, such as joint planning time, access to community partnerships, and proven curricula.