



CIRCLE

When journalists, scholars, policymakers, activists, and members of civic and professional organizations need reliable information, hard facts, penetrating analysis, or quick data on how young Americans are participating in public life, they turn to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE).

Since its founding in 2001, this think tank with a mission has been doing more than just generating information. Through its research, it has helped shape the landscape within which young people participate in the political process. Director Peter Levine moved CIRCLE in 2008 from the University of Maryland to the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts, where he also serves as director of research. He wanted to be near a critical mass of academics in psychology, sociology, and political science who share his interest in promoting democracy by better understanding youth behavior around things like voting, campaigning, volunteering, online activism, and community service.

With five full-time researchers and a grants-based budget ranging from \$500,000 to \$1 million annually, CIRCLE is recognized as the premier source of scholarship and ideas in a field it helped to build. Levine, who has authored and edited many books, including *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens*, *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century*, and *Engaging Young People in Civic Life*, refers to CIRCLE as “the research arm” of a movement that is succeeding in promoting increased participation in the public sphere. Its activities include:

- **Research:** CIRCLE uses a variety of techniques for generating information.

They include focus groups, surveys, data analysis, and quantitative as well as qualitative investigations into various aspects of youth civic participation. CIRCLE has conducted scientific studies using randomly selected control groups to measure the efficacy of techniques and approaches in education and in politics. CIRCLE publishes a steady stream of special reports and books on topics such as social networking, voter participation, and political socialization.

- **Advocacy:** CIRCLE is proud to be an independent non-partisan research group. It only advocates one thing: trustworthy, high-quality knowledge and understanding about youth political culture are vital to nurturing a vibrant and durable democracy.
- **Policy:** CIRCLE has an evolving and ongoing research agenda aimed at shedding light on areas of concern to policymakers both inside and outside of government. CIRCLE works collaboratively with clients and with foundations to identify questions and dilemmas most in need of study and elucidation. It has formal partnerships with organizations such as the American Bar Association, the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, and the National Council for the Social Studies, which are trying to more thoroughly integrate youth into their activities. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, co-chaired by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and former Representative Lee Hamilton, was formed to advocate the conclusions of a report co-produced by CIRCLE in 2003 and continues to work closely with CIRCLE.

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- **Education:** CIRCLE supports teachers by both designing and studying curricular and non-curricular ways to better teach principles of civic life and develop opportunities for participation. CIRCLE has also provided training and technical assistance to at least 300 organizations, mostly direct providers of services to youth.
- **Scholarship:** Studies generated by CIRCLE have been published and cited in a broad range of academic journals and bulletins, such as the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Applied Developmental Science*, and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, among others. Such publications help advance knowledge and basic understanding in a growing field of inquiry. Google Scholar™ (a search engine restricted to scholarly publications) finds 41,800 publications that cite CIRCLE by its full name.
- **Media:** In the last election cycle, CIRCLE fielded hundreds of inquiries from reporters in print and electronic media. CIRCLE's research was cited more than 1,200 times by such national media outlets as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*, and on CNN, NPR, PBS, MTV, and Fox News. CIRCLE posts timely and informative fact sheets to its website (www.civicyouth.org), and provides qualified and articulate experts in a variety of fields who are ready to give in-depth interviews or provide fast quotes on deadline. CIRCLE's website is the first search result provided by Google for terms such as "youth civic engagement," "youth turnout," "youth voting," and "civic education research."
- **Engagement:** By the end of the 2008 election cycle, it was clear that the successful political candidates invested substantially in mobilizing youth. Research that CIRCLE has generated in the last eight years not only identified the value of devoting resources to motivating young people, but also helped develop techniques for doing so. After a lull in the 1980s and 1990s, young people are again playing a more robust role in the political process as evidenced by a 15-percentage point rise in youth turnout between 2000 and 2008.
- **Current Focus I:** Young Americans have glaringly and persistently unequal opportunities to become civically engaged, depending on which schools they attend and which neighborhoods they live in. The civic opportunity gap is a current research priority for CIRCLE. CIRCLE is studying the enormous gap between urban and suburban schools, and investigating the experiences and beliefs of young adults who do not attend college (who comprise more than half of the demographic cohort).
- **Current Focus II:** CIRCLE is involved in two major projects relating to digital media. One is testing and refining a computer game called *Legislative Aide* in 20 high school classrooms in Tampa, Fla., to measure its effectiveness for teaching civics. The other is helping to create and study a social networking site for college students in Boston aimed at supporting volunteer projects.

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SELECTED RESEARCH SPONSORS

- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Case Foundation
- Corporation for National and Community Service
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- Spencer Foundation