



 Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Youth Council

2015-16 Report

Overview

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth Council (CMYC), a program of Charlotte nonprofit GenerationNation, is the student advisory council for City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. High school students from different backgrounds, neighborhoods, and schools across the community meet regularly to learn about and discuss local government and community issues and provide student feedback and ideas to public officials, civic leaders, news media, and others in the community.

The youth council is a partnership between GenerationNation, the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). It was launched in 2013 as an expansion of a pilot program developed by GenerationNation and CMS. The CMYC is now in its 4th year (2016-17) and receives positive local, state, and national attention.

Goals

The council helps teens take an active role in learning how to solve challenges impacting Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

- Advise policy- and decision-makers on issues impacting youth and children
- Learn about government, the key issues, and how our community works
- Build knowledge and skills for leadership, college, career and civic life
- Highlight civic issues of importance to youth
- Meet CMS, city, and county officials and community leaders
- Become a part of a communitywide network of emerging leaders – Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s next generation of leaders
- Note: the CMYC does not advocate for specific policies or positions (with rare exceptions)

Outcomes

- Increase student awareness of, interest in, and knowledge about
 - Local government
 - Community successes and challenges, and different points of view
 - Civic leadership, public service, and professional skills
 - Context of how specific policies and decisions are made
- Provide a resource to local governments, civic leaders, and news media of informed, engaged student leaders who are ready to provide feedback and ideas
- Create a network of emerging civic leaders for Charlotte-Mecklenburg

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Membership

All interested high school students are invited to participate in CMYC. Students are recommended by school leadership, teachers, officials, and community leaders and members, or are self-nominated.

Students complete an application and join the Youth Network to receive meeting information and learning opportunities. After attending a meeting, a student becomes a General Member of the council and is expected to attend at least 1 meeting per quarter to maintain membership.

Students who fulfill higher levels of attendance, service, and leadership join the Executive Committee. Each year, students elect leadership. Youth council membership is actively monitored to ensure the group is representative of schools and community.

- 100 youth participated in 2015-16 activities
- 3,500 contact hours of community education, leadership and service
- 40 high schools; live in neighborhoods across Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Activities

The CMYC meets 1-2 times monthly, usually on Tuesday evenings, at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center. Outside of scheduled meetings, CMYC members participate in a variety of related educational, leadership, and service opportunities each month including speaking with groups, serving on task forces and committees, participating on panels, representing youth in civic dialogues, and in other roles. Additional activities include the annual Alumni Q&A on College, Career, and Civic Life; student-hosted candidate forums; event and conference participation; Youth Lead Charlotte-Mecklenburg for student leaders in grades 9-10; the Youth Summit with officials; community bus tour and field trip days focused on community history and growth, local government, career exploration, and civic leadership; and Celebrate Youth Leadership event.

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A2gAqGgQ48>

2015-16 ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The youth council invested 3,500 hours interacting with leaders, exploring community issues, and learning about government, careers, history, and the community's growth and plans.

- Conducting regular dialogues with city, county, CMS, and civic leaders on topics including education, planning, budgeting, policy, economic issues, neighborhoods, and other issues.
- Meeting twice a month and getting involved in additional service and leadership activities through the year.
- Hosting special activities including Candidate Forum for Youth, Youth Summit, Alumni Q&A: College, Career, and Civic Life, and Celebrate Youth Leadership.
- Representing Charlotte-Mecklenburg students at conferences and civic events related to education, policy, leadership, and government including Charlotte Observer, WFAE, and MeckEd community dialogues and NC Youth Legislative Assembly.
- Informing and engaging emerging leaders through *Youth Lead Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, a semester-long program focused on community issues and leadership for incoming youth council members in grades 9-10.
- Interviewing candidates and writing student candidate guide to educate peers and the public about local candidates in election 2015.
- Learning about Charlotte-Mecklenburg history, policy, and growth through community bus tour and other hands-on experiences.
- Community engagement on local issues through service-learning, leadership, research and education, and student voice.
- Worked with Charlotte Observer, Education NC, WFAE, WSOC, and others to increase student voice in news media coverage of current issues.
- Attending city council, county commission, and school board meetings.
- Learning about and weighing in on current issues such as Economic Opportunity Task Force, CMS Superintendent Search, Livable Meck, student assignment, HB2, police and race relations, United Way initiatives, Charlotte Chamber initiatives, and other topics.
- And other activities.

KEY ISSUES IMPORTANT TO YOUTH

Through dialogue, research, and meetings with officials, students identified the following critical issues impacting children and youth. The youth council will continue to learn about and work with community leaders to address these issues in FY17.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT

We want all students to have access to a great education and not face learning opportunity gaps. We believe that every student deserves equal opportunities at school and outside of school. We know that most of are schools are good, but we want all to be excellent. We want all students to have good opportunities to learn and succeed. We are concerned to learn that our schools are getting increasingly segregated by race and socioeconomics. We know there are many factors to consider, including how and where neighborhoods and businesses are planned and located. We want to help community leaders through feedback, solutions, and ideas.

RACE RELATIONS

Why don't people work together? We read the news, and see what it happening in our neighborhoods, schools, community, and nation. Things are getting worse. We want a solution.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS

Why don't officials and governments work together better? Many of the issues that concern us, such as education funding, teachers, school facilities, student assignment, and equity are issues that different governments and officials need to work on together.

STUDENT VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

What is the future of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and North Carolina? WE ARE. We want the community and state to grow and be successful in the future so that we, as today's students, can be here work, live, play, and lead as adults. We are invested in making the community great now, and for the future. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth Council is available to provide officials with feedback and ideas, serve on committees and task forces, and have a "seat at the table" to solve the challenges facing our community.

WHO WE ARE

The CMYC is the only high school out-of-school program drawing teens from schools and neighborhoods across the community. Youth represent the widely diverse Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Youth attend public, charter, religious, and independent high schools and live in neighborhoods across the community. There is diversity in gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economics, and factors such as religion, LGBTQ status, physical handicaps, political ideologies, career interests, and having non-English speaking parents.

Participants 2015-16

# students participating in the CMYC	100+
# high schools (CMS and non-CMS)	40+
# contact hours	3,500+
Zip codes	30
% Female	54%
% Male	46%
% Black	51%
% White or Middle Eastern	27%
% Hispanic	13%
% Asian	9%
% Charlotte residents	86%
% Mecklenburg town residents	14%

Youth are recruited through school leadership, guidance counselors, teachers, student government and newspaper advisors, local governments, youth organizations, church youth groups, social media, news media, and other ways.

The youth council is designed to be inclusive, offering opportunities for students to attend a meeting on a topic of interest or to engage more deeply through meetings, service, and leadership.

An additional 100+ students are part of the Youth Network, receiving regular information and meeting announcements, and participate in surveys, and follow youth council activities, etc. outside of meeting attendance. Factors impacting participation include transportation challenges, particularly in areas of on the county perimeter and areas not served safely by transit, competing activities (for example, the Lake Norman/North Mecklenburg area has its own youth council and students at some schools are exposed to a large number of extracurricular activities.), and interest level. Participation is actively monitored, and recruiting ensures a representative council. Importantly, youth are limited by busy schedules and by external factors such as family issues, jobs, sports, transportation, weather, homework, etc. Even if members can't attend every meeting, all are still committed to making Charlotte-Mecklenburg a better place!

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WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

I was surprised to learn....

In general

- That everyone was welcomed in the program no matter what school or who you were
- How democracy isn't always smooth because there can be so many solutions and approaches to any problem.
- I was honestly surprised by the diversity of the group. I thought it would mostly be schools from the south Charlotte area, but I got to meet people from all over Charlotte instead!
- I never knew we would cover things I care about such as teen domestic violence and LGBT. I thought we would only talk about political things.
- I learned that other students in CMS care about the same things that I do. It surprised me how open we all are to speak about what we believe and what we wish to see in the future.
- It was surprising to learn that our community is so diverse and unique.
- I was so surprised about how things went. Before, I thought that the community worked in groups and those groups only did their job in the community. If a group failed it was because of their incompetence or if a group was a success it was because of their competence. But what I learned is that in order for any group or organization to work effectively you need ALL the of the community help.
- That there were a lot more issues and good things in Charlotte than I thought.
- All the career opportunities we were exposed to. I never knew what United Way even did.
- I was surprised to learn about how the chain of the Charlotte government works and all the different positions and organizations working to make Charlotte better.

Local issues and history

- The rate of economic mobility in Charlotte because honestly I thought it was pretty easy for people to succeed.
- How much work goes into making Charlotte be successful as a city.
- The amount of actual poverty in the Charlotte area.
- I think I learned a lot about the economic disparity in Charlotte. Being a resident in South Charlotte, I am isolated in a small bubble where I'm not exposed to the true issues here.
- One thing I was surprised to learn was about the bussing that happened in the past and how not only the schools, but the whole city was greatly affected from this. This surprised me because I was not aware of this situation in the past, and now I was able to know more about our history.
- I never knew that bussing was a tactic back then to try to integrate different races.
- The fact that CMS schools have basically become re-segregated over the years both along racial and socioeconomic lines was shocking to me. It's 2016, the fact that equality still does

2015-16 Report



not exist in public schools really blows my mind. I think the local government needs to do something about it.

- I was surprised to learn about the achievement gap. It is not a term I had heard about.
- I was surprised that schools are still segregated. I had never thought about where I fit in with a topic like segregation.
- One thing I was surprised to learn about was Charlotte's stance in segregation. And when I say segregation, I mean segregation in between the economic levels of the people living in Charlotte. I was so surprised to learn about segregation being an actual problem. I was so surprised to learn about it, because throughout the program not only did we receive a multitude of statistics and facts but we also got to see it for ourselves throughout the tours of some communities.

Making a difference

- The most surprising thing for me was how much of an impact even the smallest change can make. If you do something so minute as adding a streetlight, you can completely change someone's life for the better! It surprised me because it doesn't seem like changing some things will make that much of a difference, but now I see that it always does.
- The amount of hard work it takes to get all of the work done in this city.
- I was surprised to learn more about how we can actually affect the community. And how much value that we all have to the community
- That students could actually have a say so in rules and policies implemented here.
- How slow the action takes place in school policy because of the lack of progress on the student on the School Board.
- How many young men and women cared about their local government and officials
- That youth's opinions were relevant.
- Charlotte had adults that wanted to listen to our opinions

CMS

- I didn't realize that the Charlotte Mecklenburg school system was so large and I learned of a lot of schools that I had never heard of before. This put in perspective how difficult it must be to control and supervise all of the different schools.
- I was surprised to learn that teacher vacancies was a district wide issue because I was not aware of occurrences at other schools. Now I know!
- How much money CMS actually put into schools and pay teachers. The reason being is because I want to be a teacher.
- How much money CMS schools actually get
- I was surprised to hear about what was happening with the student assignment because I never heard about it until I started attending youth council meetings.
- One thing that I was surprised to learn was that CMS re-draws school lines every 10 years.

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2015-16 Report



- How much consideration is taken into approving more money for CMS
- I was surprised to learn about the school systems in detail through questioning the candidates for the school board during the election season. It was interesting to learn their ideas of how to improve the CMS school system, through maybe increasing magnet schools.
- I was surprised to hear about other public schools and the situations occurring there. Going to a private school, I have been mostly shielded from a lot that my fellow students were experiencing. Problems with teachers, bullying, and other problems that really shocked me.
- I was surprised to learn that there are schools in CMS that has very few, if any, African-American students and vice versa. I would expect CMS to have schools with a sufficiently diverse population.

After being in the program, I am different because...

I learned and made diverse friends

- It impacted me by giving me a broader view of Charlotte then before and friends I would of never meet before
- Yes! I feel a lot more comfortable discussing local politics and expressing my opinion in groups. I have also made so many new friends!!
- I learned a lot of information from my peers at the meetings about what was going on in our community and outside of it. I looked at politics and issues differently now that I have more insight on what is really going on around me.
- It impacted me because I now, have not and won't take serious situations for granted. I also have friendships coming out of this program so I'm grateful for the friendships.
- I learned so much and met so many different people.
- I am different now because it has made me a much more open minded individual.
- They made me feel like I had a home away from home. I have matured a lot since being in the program and I have also learned a lot.
- This has impacted me in a positive way, because compared to when I started the program I feel like I have grown mentally. I feel like I have grown mentally, because there were many opportunities that we took and I felt like they helped me develop my thinking skills. I also feel like it has helped me a lot with becoming more involved, not only throughout the community but also within school.

I am a confident civic leader who can make a difference

- I am different now than when I started because I am informed of issues regarding our community but I now know how to be a leader and make a difference!
- I would most definitely I am different from when I first began the program. I actually want to be a part of fixing the education system and speaking up for what I believe in.

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2015-16 Report



- I learned how to actively participate in debate and listen to others opinions openly even if they aren't the same as mine. I learned to listen to others instead of talking.
- I've become a better community leader, this has helped me put myself out there more, and speak what I think. I have always been scared to talk in situations like this, so I really got better at this. Also, I've become more aware of schools and other students in Charlotte, I feel more knowledgeable regarding our community.
- I learned a lot of good leadership and presentation skills. I've grown as a person too.
- Before youth council I thought that I couldn't change anything in our community. I thought that if I wanted to improve any thing there was nothing I could do if I wanted to straight up get rid of something it was going to be the impossible. But when I went to the Youth council meetings and heard all of these important people talking about how much I could do with just my student voice. It inspired me to bring about change in our community and it has motivated me to become more engaged in our community than I ever thought possible.
- I feel like I am a lot more aware of all of the issues and good things in Charlotte. I am now also a lot more passionate about letting people know more about everything going on Charlotte.
- I am definitely more aware of everything going on in Charlotte, both politically and socially. I like this because it makes me sound smarter when I talk with my peers ;)
- I am different now because I was not so open-minded about the problems in our community. Now I'm very broad-minded and I really want a change in the community to make it all better
- Yes, now I am not only more involved in discussions in my school but I am also someone who starts these deep conversations.
- I'm different now that I've gotten to share or voice my opinion with people that can really impact this nation.
- It impacted me because I feel like I finally have a voice
- It has shown me that there is hope for the future generations seeing how successful all these people are in our group and will be
- When I became apart of this program it opened my eyes to the different view points and helped my resume grow.
- It opened my eyes to what's happening in my community and that I can help.
- I am more aware of community problems now and see that we need to and can all get involved.

I understand how the community works and about different issues and views

- This experience gave me insight into our local community that no other program could have, and this opens my mind to broader ideas on current political issues. We have closely followed current issues and discussed many of them in depth. Our knowledge we comment in respect to these issues we derive from government officials that are the people who solve these issues.

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2015-16 Report



- I learned a lot about the local government, policy making procedures, non-profit organizations, topics debated by our own city council and much more. This program opened my eyes up to many opportunities and let me witness things I have never seen before. It was a truly amazing experience.
- Before I joined I really didn't know as much as I did about Charlotte. Now because I know the data and percentages of info. It makes me wiser.
- it impacted me by having me be more aware of not just the little things in our community today, but also to the history of our city and how it came to be. Also I now know more about other schools and more open to different viewpoints.
- It has impacted my role as a student and citizen in a positive way. I have a greater perspective of my community from when I first started.
- By learning perspectives of many people and areas, I'm more knowledgeable about different situations.
- It has impacted me by showing me what the city council, and school boards are doing to make it a better place for the kids and the adults in Charlotte.
- I feel like I am much more aware of the complexity of running a school which helps me be more understanding and realistic.
- It changed me by helping me to learn more about the way the government works and the way that people in politics think. It's much different from a scientist or a teacher. By listening to some amazing leaders speak and talking with them, I was able to learn this.
- It has impacted my political knowledge drastically. Prior to joining the program, I despised politics and had little knowledge about it, however, after joining the program, I have a deeper interest in politics, due to the insight the program gave about the field.
- I will definitely think first before criticize any the officials because they really do an important job!
- I have become more aware of what is going on in Charlotte. I pay more attention to news about CMS in particular. I have also become more aware of the plethora of projects going on in Charlotte, such as the transportation system and the proposed mini-city.
- I have a different view point, a broader perspective that's helping me be more open minded.
- CMYC has given me a look into a career field that I aspire to be a part of. I have always wanted to be a judge or teacher, but before attending these meetings I never even knew what a government center was, let alone knowing a judge or school official. I am able to have an awareness of some of charlotte's local policies and policies going on around the world. The conversation with all of the other students and high school scholars makes me feel intelligent and like I could grow up to be successful as a judge, teacher, or anything.

My favorite session...

Talking with leaders

- My favorite session is when we talked to the city manager. It was cool to get insight on his daily activities and schedules.
- The one where we got to see Mayor Roberts take the oath of office because I felt like I was a part of a big moment in our city's history, and it was cool to see how the process and exchange of power works. It was also awesome that we got to meet the mayor!
- The Youth Summit because of all of the leaders that came and voiced their opinions and listened to what students had to say about issues.
- I liked learning about the county's work with teen dating violence, health, and parks.
- When we talked to Ann Clark and attended the WFAE debate because it was really interesting.
- I really liked talking to the CMS Board Members when they came to our meeting.
- I really enjoyed the session when we split into small groups and worked with leaders of Charlotte, and discussed difficulties in moving up of social status in Charlotte. I found this very interesting, it made me feel very lucky about the opportunities I've been given since I was born, and it made me want to make a change.
- The session when the alumni come and talk to us because they tell the truth on college.
- The session I liked the best was when we interviewed the mayors to be. I had a great time really getting to know Mr. Peacock. I have never met a Republican before. Although he did not win, I still understood his point of views and he said some really encouraging words.
- When the alumni came to speak to up about college and leadership

Learning about public education

- Where we talked about what is most important to CMS with a journalist because since I don't go to a CMS school it was great to see what really is important in schools
- The one I liked the best was the one about busing because that was a big issue and topic for me and I had a lot to say.
- When we went around different tables and were able to speak to different school board candidates.
- I liked the session with the school board election candidates because it gave insight about the school system that I am currently a student it. It gave information about the school system's needs and the improvements the candidates planned to make to it.
- I liked when Dr. Amy Hawn Nelson came and talked about diversity in schools. It helped me to see the other side of the student assignment controversy.
- The session I liked the most was when we talked about the history of bussing and how it has changed schools throughout the years.

2015-16 Report



- My favorite session was the session with Amy Hawn Nelson. I feel like I was able to learn a LOT about student assignment and the true story behind Charlotte.
- I liked when we talked about HB2. It was such a controversial topic being discussed so everyone got involved in the discussion. Everyone!
- HB2 discussion was amazing.
- Talking about economic mobility.
- My favorite session would have to be the one where we split up into different groups & discussed different topics about our city.
- The session I liked the best was when we were able to divide up into smaller groups and discuss different subjects within our group and later share with everyone. I enjoyed this because we were able to know more about the people in our small group.

Exploring the city

- I liked the session where we listened to a speaker talk about city improvement through bettering parks or adding bike lanes. I liked this best because it seemed like very simple projects that even high school students could become involved in to better our community.
- My favorite session would have to be when we did a walking tour of our city. It's my favorite because it showed me some of the hidden beauties of our city.
- The one we walked around the city and went to United Way and Chamber.
- The session I liked the most was the session we had, when we got a tour of Charlotte. It was a part of Charlotte where I saw every body working together to help the community and where I saw the community helping the people.
- When we toured Charlotte to learn more about zoning and see how the city grows.
- I enjoyed the tour of the city on the bus the most. I was able to see more of the city and learn more about here everything is.
- The session where we went downtown and to United Way. We got to explore and see parts of Charlotte I didn't know existed. I'm a naturally adventurous so it was really fun for me.
- I liked the session where we got to tour the town and see all the historical feature that are imbedded within all of their architecture.
- I enjoyed the session in which we traveled around the city because I was able to see parts of the city that I had not seen before. I also learned about the differences between the different areas of Charlotte.
- The session that I liked the best was when we went on the tours of East and West Charlotte. I liked that session the best because we got a chance to be outside a room actually go around Charlotte. I also liked it because although I lived in Charlotte, we toured places I had never been around, and I thought that was just very interesting.
- I loved the session where we simulated a city council meeting. It was a very unique experience and was eye-opening.
- Going to different places was eye-opening and helped me see the struggles that exist here.

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2015-16 Report



The youth council narrows learning opportunity gaps through authentic and transformative civics and leadership experiences, with 100% of students:

- Interacting with and discussing issues with community leaders
- Learning about and applying knowledge to help solve community issues
- Learning about and interacting with local government
- Meeting and collaborating with youth from other schools and backgrounds

Knowledge of topic	Start of year 1= low 5= high	End of year 1= low 5= high	Growth
Local government	1.81	3.42	47%
Local civic issues	1.68	3.97	58%
Different perspectives	2.16	4.42	49%
Civic leadership	2.10	3.61	42%
How public policy decisions are made	2.03	3.32	39%
Who makes the decisions	1.71	3.32	47%
Needs of other schools & neighborhoods	2.42	4.10	41%
How to engage in and impact civic issues	1.81	4.19	57%
Topic			Result
Know how to read and analyze information			94%
Can make good decisions			93%
Am a confident communicator			91%
Consider myself a leader			88%
Want to play a role in making my school, neighborhood, and community better			89%
Know how to collaborate with different kinds of people			89%
Believe local officials understand the needs of youth and involve youth in evaluating and making decisions impacting kids <i>(change from 2013-14 program)</i>			73% (+15%)
Plans for the future. I will...			Result
Serve in group leadership role			95%
Register and vote			94%
Understand government			89%
Attend and graduate college			93%
Get a job in a field of interest			95%
Live in Charlotte as a young professional			75%

(GenerationNation has begun to survey program alumni to assess their continued engagement and leadership after high school graduation. Benchmarks will be developed for future data.)

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BUILDING A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Through GenerationNation and community partners, the youth council is building a leadership pipeline. For the second year, incoming youth council members in 9th and 10th grades spent a semester learning about the community, civic issues, and leadership through the Youth Lead Charlotte-Mecklenburg pilot program.

After graduation, youth council members join the alumni network. Over their winter break, alumni came back home and met with the youth council. They talked about college, getting internships and jobs, getting involved in service and leadership, and other topics. The alumni continue to be involved in other ways, building networks and giving back as they grow as leaders and young adults who will impact our community for years to come.



Grades 9-10 learn about community, issues, leadership



High school student advisory board for city, county, and CMS



Leaders through college, career, civic life

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The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth Council as a resource

Educates emerging leaders through real-world experiences (the best way to learn) about how our governments and community work, the key issues, different perspectives, and how citizens and leaders collaborate to solve problems.

Connects community leaders with a ready youth resource for informed, thoughtful feedback that can be used to strengthen policy and decision-making.

Suggested ways you or your organization might utilize the Youth Council include:

Youth council members are eager to engage via dialogue, email, surveys, social media, and other methods. Due to school, after school activities, work, family, and transportation considerations, youth council member time is limited. We will work with you to effectively and efficiently maximize the CMYC as a resource for you.

- Refer current issues for youth council recommendations
- Solicit youth council feedback on budget priorities and strategic goals
- Use the youth council, and their communitywide networks, to highlight or share information about City/County/CMS initiatives and leadership
- Attend designated youth council meetings and activities, for a quick 10-minute dialogue to get the “pulse” of youth on a topic, or a longer dialogue
- Enable youth council members to serve with adults on task forces and committees
- Invite youth council members to participate in civic events

Get involved

Students All high school students are invited to join the youth council. Visit www.generationnation.org/index.php/youthvoice to learn more and apply

Community leaders, volunteers, parents, and teachers Connect your school or organization, volunteer to educate and engage a new generation, or invest financial or inkind resources.

Connect on social media Follow GenerationNation on social media and look for the #cltmeckyouth hashtag.

Contact

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www.generationnation.org/index.php/youthvoice

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