YOU ARE HERE

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Democracy

can't work,

unless we do.

We are living in increasingly complex times. While we have become more connected to our world, we are moving further and further apart from one another. Increasingly, citizens are losing site of the role they play in their communities—becoming complacent and virtual citizens while our real world ties and bonds are crumbling.

This is reflected in the numbers—2014 marked the lowest local election voter turnout in 72 years, with the New York Times citing New York's turnout as "shameful" with just over 28%, of the city coming out to vote—the fourth-lowest in the country[1].

With voter turnout declining for decades[2] many efforts have been focusing nationally, but when we look locally the numbers are even scarier. Frequently—with less than 25% of citizens coming to vote in local elections. So much so, in 2015, New York didn't even conduct a ballot count[3].

If we look closely at our local governments we can see that they make decisions and create local policy that affect directly their residents having immediate consequences in their daily lives. Decisions about schools and education, transportation, economic development, housing, justice system, zoning and taxes among others.

Democracy starts at a local level. If community members work together they can demand a better well-being for themselevs and their neighborhood, from fixing broken lights on their streets to better policy for economic opportunities.

1   The Worst Voter Turnout in 72 Years, New York Times: November 2014.

2   Voter turnout in 2014 was the Lowest Since WWII, Washington Post: November 2014.

3   New York 2015 Ballot Measures. Ballotpedia: January 2015

Luckily, we are not alone in feeling this way. The New York City Comptroller has just released a city-wide initiative to improve voter turnout[4], attempts to fix the process in many ways; including providing better poll worker training and allowing people to register the same day as an election day, but we have found this will not be enough.

It is time for us to reinvigorate the connections we have to our community—amplifying our role in all of this. If, as citizens, we want to re-balance our democracy we must not treat elections like they come every four years and are only used to elect one person.

Instead we must mobilize all voters—but especially young ones who are in the process of forming their own civic habits—to understand the importance of and take stake in local elections, which affect their communities most directly.

We believe that young voters need to develop an understanding of how their individual actions and inactions have a direct impact on rebalancing the power in this country.

4   Breaking Down Barriers to the Ballot: 16 Ideas to Increase Voter Engagement in New York City New York Comptroller's Office: 2016

You Are Here is a an inside-out approach that develops active citizens by helping young adults connect the issues they care about to local policy making.

Initial Approach

Understanding the context, we began to look at how we could increase voter turnout in Bronx Community College students.

Why Community College Students

1. Community College student's experiences are very different than their peers who have moved away to attend school. They are transitioning to adulthood in the neighborhoods where they have lived a large portion of their lives. In turn, are more connected to their community.

2. A majority of New York community college students are people of color. Voter-turnout is lowest among minorities.

3. Many are first generation Americans—with parents as non-citizens—they lack the guidance and support to learn how to participate in the civics process.

4. Most are coming to college through underfunded high schools where, like arts education, civics courses fall by the wayside. Therefore, many have developed misconceptions around voting eligibility, local issues, and the political system.

UNDERSTANDING VOTING PERCEPTIONS

FEELING	NEED
"I am just one vote" *Voting is irrelevant*	A sense of collective when an individual moves through the voting process.
"I'm too busy" *More pressing priorities*	A way to simplify the system that removes complex barriers to participate
"I don't care" *Apathetic*	Information that effectively explain how policy and government influence well-being
"All they care about is money" *Skeptical to trust decision makers*	Transparent mechanisms that hold elected officials accountable or inadequate channels to demand new mechanisms.
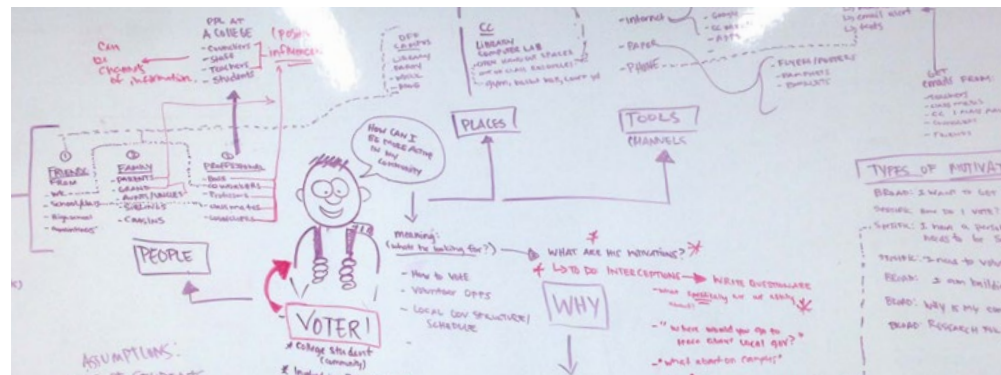
To begin our understanding, we mapped out a college student's touch points with local government. Including first assumptions on why they would seek out more information on participating.

(May 2015–November 2015)

Discovery

Once we had developed an understanding of the context we began conducting primary research with the aim to better understand our user, while also testing a few initial assumptions.

We conducted interviews with advisors, student life coordinators, and civic engagement specialists within the CUNY (City University of New York) network.

After making contact with CUNY staff, we went out to talk to students on campus. During initial interceptions we asked students generally about their understanding of local and national elections and began to see a disconnect on how they perceived the power dynamics of the two.

While all of these students were aware that they could vote for the President of the United States, many of them overlooked municipal government's role in many aspects of their daily lives.

ASSUMPTION 1: Changing the way we talk about voting can inspire more students to register to vote.

"Staying engaged ... and holding each other accountable helps and influences their decision to stay in college."
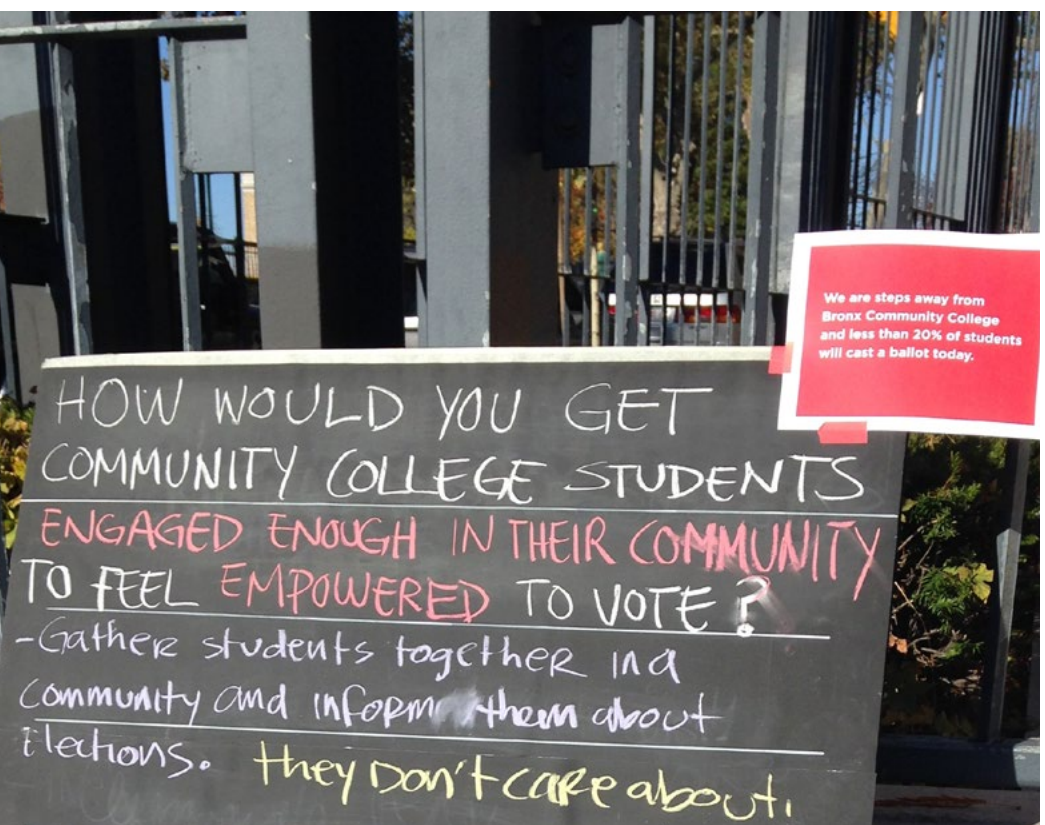
—Shahreen, Student Life Director CUNY
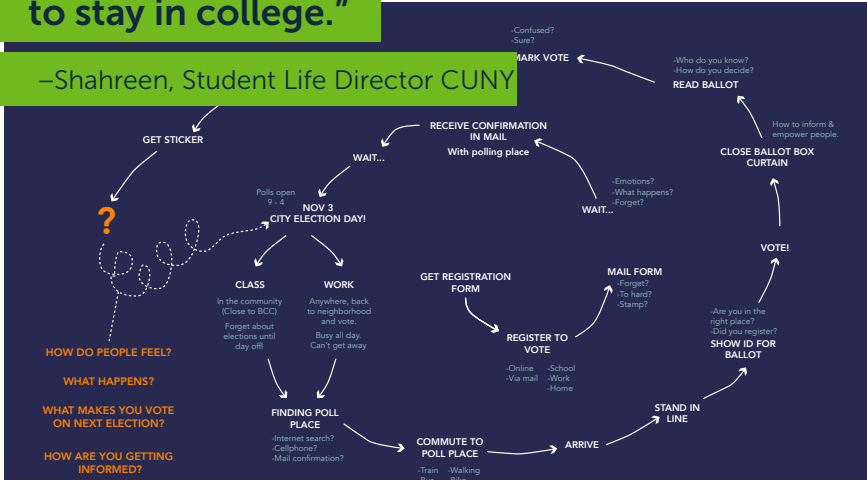
We also began mapping the journey of the voting process to better understand any intervention points.
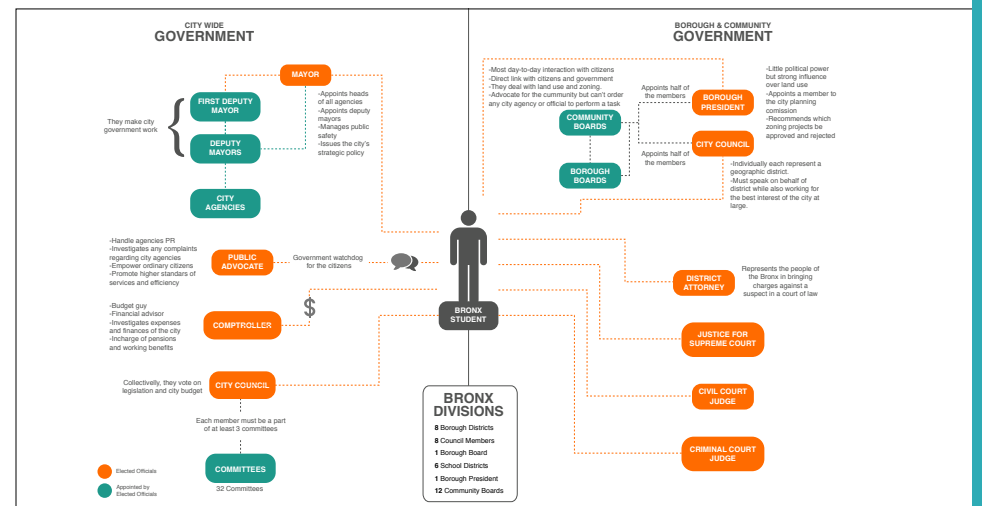
Secondary Research

While our primary research was to test assumptions, we had a stream of secondary research which was continuously happening in the background. We define our secondary research as research we conducted to better understand the landscape and context of the problem. Primarily desktop research, it included:

- Academic civic engagement literature review
- Exploration of existing civic engagement programs in colleges
- A history of social movements: Student Anti-war movement, Civil Rights movement, Black Power movement & Mexican American movement
- Mapping and understanding the structure of New York City Government
- Immigrant experience literature review
- Landscape of civic engagement tools and programs
- Landscape of relevant organizations

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OUR LIVES BEGIN TO END THE DAY WE BECOME SILENT ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER
-Martin Luther King Jr.

YOU GOT POWER

THE TRUTH? YOU CAN HANDLE THE TRUTH!

How to understand power - Eric Liu
WHERE POWER COMES FROM
HOW IT'S EXERCISED
WHAT YOU CAN DO
6:17 / 7:01

BMCC
Clubs meet in these rooms Wednesdays from 2pm-3:50pm.

Student Clubs - Spring 2015
Academic Clubs
BMCC Accounting Club (F510)
Business Enterprise Club (F704)
Chi Alpha Epsilon Honor Society (N580)
College Discovery Club (S722)
Communication Studies Club (5737)
Criminal Justice Club (F606)
Economics & Finance Club (F703)
Health & Wellness Club (N786)
Health Information Technology (N762)
Honor Society of Black Student Scholars (S736)
Life Drawing Club (F1105)
Math Club (N781)
Music Club (M1216)
Out-In-Two Club (S739)
Psychology Club (N468)
Research and Nature Club (F209)
Respiratory Therapy Club (N777)
Science Club (S612)

We are steps away from Bronx Community College and less than 20% of students will cast a ballot today.

HOW WOULD YOU GET COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ENGAGED ENOUGH IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO FEEL EMPOWERED TO VOTE?
-Gather students together in a community and inform them about elections. they Don't care about.

Secondary research included:
making maps of New York City
government and exploring
existing voting tools & programs.

Voter Registration Observation

In the early stages of our research, we had the chance to observe a voter registration drive happening at Guttman Community College. We brought our own posters and materials to spark conversations with students around registration and voting processes from a more relatable perspective.

We had some assumptions around the language used by different organizations. We believed that the current messaging was not an appealing way to motivate our audience. So, we decided to design posters and flyers to test shifting the language around elections to stop talking to students with terms like voting, elections, ballot, candidates, etc.

WHAT WE LEARNED:

While we thought this observation experience would give us insight into different methods of communicating to young people, we actually learned of the countless other problems surrounding a registration drive.

Our biggest learning surrounded the disconnect between the act of registering and actually casting a ballot. In general students did not understand registration as part of a larger voting process, seeing that the students could not articulate what the next step in the processes actually was and therefore did not understand what registering really meant.

A second learning surrounded how the student's talked about politics in general. They were vaguely aware of the presidential elections, repeating sound bites from the news, but all overlooked how local elections were the more important than national.
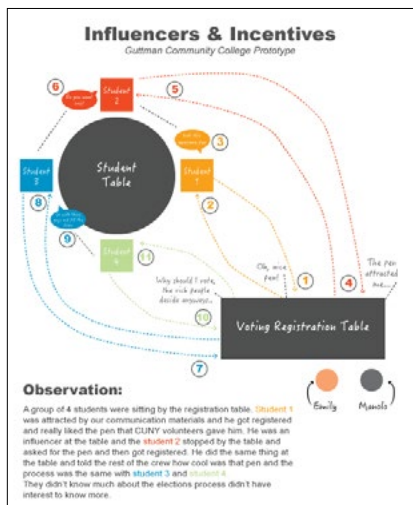
Influencers & Incentives
Guttman Community College Prototype

Observation:

A group of 4 students were sitting by the registration table. Student 1 was attracted by our communication materials and he got registered and really liked the pen that CUNY volunteers gave him. He was an influencer at the table and the student 2 stopped by the table and asked for the pen and then got registered. He did the same thing at the table and told the rest of the crew how cool was that pen and the process was the same with student 3 and student 4.
They didn't know much about the elections process didn't have interest to know more.

Interviews & Card Sort

Through our initial interviews, we were having trouble articulating reasons students might want to vote that were deeper than just saying "it's the right thing to do as citizens". This lead us to understand that perhaps we needed to talk about something other than voting.

We went to Bronx Community College and conducted a series of interceptions that began with some basic get to know you questions to understand how they identified culturally, what they were studying in school, where they lived in the Bronx, and how much time they spent on and off campus. We then used a card sort to open up a dialogue and see how students reacted to issues we thought they carried about. The answers we got were expected in some ways but also revealed a lot to us.

WHAT WE LEARNED:

Having a visual aid in front of students was somewhat helpful, but the language we used was confusing and "jargony". For instance, one card said "Affordable Housing" but, we talked about "the projects"

What was exciting was that some students did care, but none could articulate why voting was the solution, and were not too enthusiastic about having a conversations around these issues. They felt to broad and too fuzzy.

This issue sort was interesting, but what we also learned was that none of the students were registered to vote or even knew if they were registered. We wanted to better understand registration process because it was a necessary barrier preventing these students from voting.
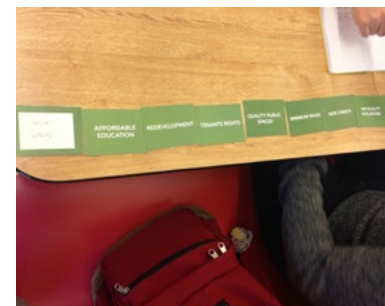
"It did spark my attention and made me consider voting ... because of the impact it has on all— especially in my community" –Jesse, 21

Define

It quickly became apparent to us that we needed to reframe voting in a different way. We had set out from the start to change this conversation and a common theme that kept coming up in our research was that student's just didn't care. Fixated on this notion, we began testing a series of prototypes, each exploring how we could help students feel more connected to elections.

Justice Prototype

This past November—for the first time in 25 years—there was to be a non-incumbent Bronx District Attorney election. In preparation for this election, we decided that we wanted to help students connect this important election. We did this by testing two assumptions.

ASSUMPTION 4: Lead with the issues that surround an election before talking about candidates to hook students into seeing why voting is important.

The prototype happened in two parts. In the first we created an attention grabber to pull interested students towards us.

Using a chalkboard we tried to showcase the issues that were under debate, over the candidates or even the election. We wanted to create a hook that would interest students and allow them to hear more about the election. We used a series of specific questions to try and pull personal experiences from people who engaged with the black board.

- *What's the problem with justice in the Bronx?*
- *What would you change about the Bronx Court System?*
- *How has the slow Bronx criminal justice system affected you?*

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People responded the most to "What would you change about the Bronx court system?". We think because it is specific (easy to think about yourself) and empowering (a direct call to action).

ASSUMPTION 5: If students are given concise and relevant information showing candidate stances on issues, they will be able to make make an informed choice when voting.

This assumption proved tricker that we thought to test. Through our research we found that local candidates do not take a written stance on any issue and like to keep things a bit gray. Matched with the fact that neither of us are political experts, this became a barrier in us presenting concrete and factual information to students. Additionally, we found it very difficult to synthesize the complexity of the issues into one hand out—afraid of missing information the handout design was not as successful as we had intended.

WHAT WE LEARNED

This prototype was a true turning point for us. When we reframed elections to be about the issues we got so many stories about the problems with the Bronx criminal justice system. We began to see that these issues were things they did connect to, but what they failed to do was connect these issues to the elections the next day. We had been so worried about getting the candidate information to be correct and clear in hopes that students would go vote the next day, but quickly realized that there were a series of steps that we (and everyone else) seemed to miss.

Instead of trying to move students through each step we knew that we changed our problem statement to focus specifically on making this switch.

"The information that you provided was great, but I could not store it in my brain." –Billy, 19

How might we help students **relate** the **issues** that affect their neighborhood with local policy making?

User Journey Map

To better understand our solution space, we created a series of user journey maps outlining the feelings that a young person needs to go through before they can take ownership over the issues they care about. We highlighted two key areas to focus on the rest of our research on: reflection & investigation.

Empowered

Powerless

Ownership

Clarity

Curious

Aware

Overwhelmed

Confusion

Disconnection   **Reflection**   **Investigation**   **Participation**

Is your person the right kind of powerful?

Right now, sitting in the City Council there are **two bills** which will put in motion steps to hold the NYPD accountable by law.

There are 5 Bronx City Council members who are speaking out for our neighborhoods and are sponsoring the "Right to Know" Act.

Do you live in a sponsoring district?

Check to see if your neighborhood is sponsoring this bill.

DISTRICT 11
DISTRICT 12
DISTRICT 14
DISTRICT 15
DISTRICT 13
DISTRICT 16
DISTRICT 18
DISTRICT 17
DISTRICT 8

EVER BEEN STOPPED OR SEARCHED BY THE NYPD...

Using insights from earlier research, we knew that in order for young people to connect to issues we had to make them feel as tangible and definite as possible. Talking about things like economic development and public safety were too fuzzy to actually form an opinion on.

To explore this concept we choose two bills being debated in the City Council and crafted a series of prototypes—each testing communication on why this local policy relates and should matter to students.

PROTECTING NYC FROM BOGUS NYPD SEARCHES.

Page   Messages   Notifications   Publishing Tools

WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO **GIVE A DAMN.**

BRONX POWER

Bronx Power
Community

Timeline   About   Photos   Likes   More

BRONX

NYPD

Each prototype was designed to cover four steps:

AWARENESS: Is there a problem that applies to me?
INVESTIGATION: Is there a solution I can know more about?
DIGESTION: How does this apply to me?
CHOICE: Do I understand enough to seek out more information?
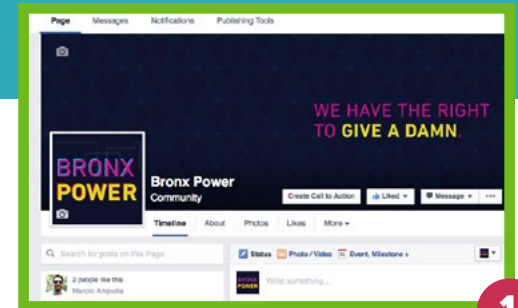
While each one had varying degrees of success, we consistently saw that when students could match their own experiences with a piece of policy they began to make a deeper connection to why they should care about local government.

First, we made a video which lived within a Facebook group. This was to help us curate the relevant messaging. But, we really were more interested in watching people interact with a physical structure in an off-line setting.

In the second prototype we found that after interacted with the information students kept asking for an action step, "now, what can I do about this". Learning from this, we used this same concept and had voter registration as the next step.

Target Audicnce

Finding an In-Road

While we had been focusing on community college students for most of the year, we had had very little success finding partners in the right place with access to students we could work with over a period of time.

But, through a series of connections, we came into contact with the Young Adult Borough Center.

The YBAC is an accelerated night school program that helps young adults 18-21 finish their high school degree. These students should have graduated for various reasons (something as minor as missing gym credits to something as major as a family member's passing). Through YABC's internship coordinator Yessenia, we were given the opportunity to further test some of our assumptions.

Though this change in audience caused us to pivot our location and target, the group of students shared many of the same characteristics of community college students and they even provided a few better opportunities for us to work with.

The students we were able to work with are apart of the YABC's "Learning to Work" internship program, meaning they worked during the day while attending classes at night. Unlike their peers who have gone on to college or to vocational programs and are starting adulthood, these students are in a state of limbo. They wanted to be treated as adults and are juggling adult responsibilities but are still trying to finish high school.

(February 2016–April 2016)

Develop

Similarly to community college, the YABC students are in period of transition and transformation, but unlike those that attend community college, they are involved holistic program that provides students a range of support. From youth advocate counselors—which prepare students for SAT's and college applications, to a social worker for socio-emotional issues, to an internship coordinator that helps them learn skills for the workplace, these students are supported in a facet of ways. Why not civic engagement as well?

Prototyping & Iterations

Through a series of three workshops we were able to further refine how to help students detangle and relate to issues surrounding local government.

Taking an iterative approach we used each workshop to inform the next— developing and testing a series of icebreakers, group discussion, and individual reflections each attempted to move conversation away from voting and candidates towards issues that these students cared about.

By the end of the third workshop we had students actively debating and discussing real policy solutions to issues they had identified in their communities.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES:

Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3
03.02.2016	03.02.2016	03.23.2016
Identifying issues as issues: *Transform frustration* and roadblocks into points of *curiosity* **Break down issues into the tangible parts:** Discovering "who", "what", "how", and "where" that make up issues	*Build trust* between us and group *Build ownership* of issues through peer to peer conversation with "undercover" facilitation *Deepen understanding* of the connection they have with their community *Combat apathy* by creating a space to build on each others ideas	Understand the *NYC district* structure *Relate issues* they care about to policy decisions *Understand stance* on issues through peer to peer conversation Make *informed* decisions
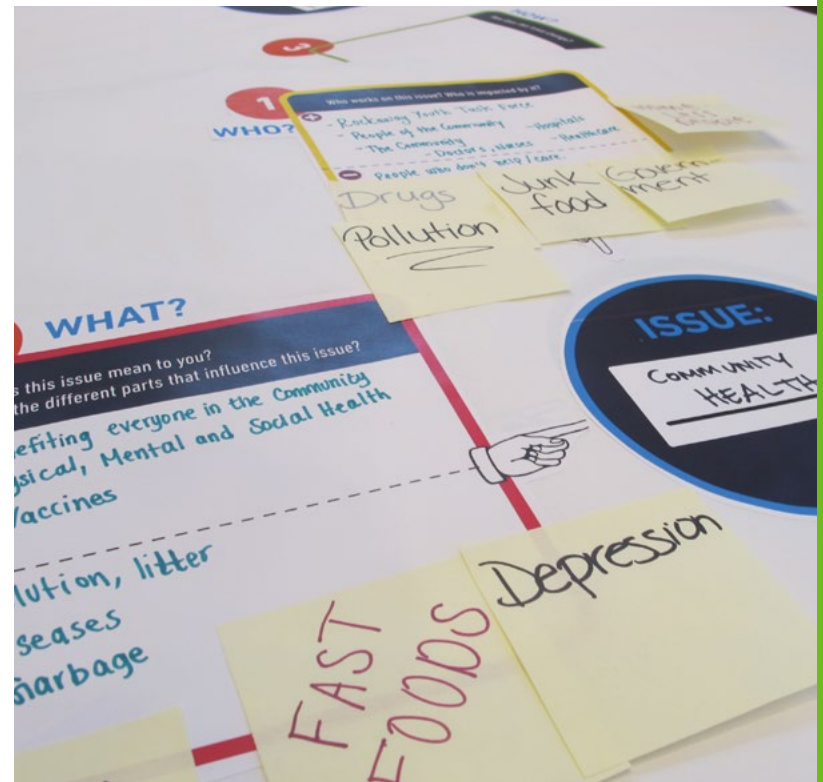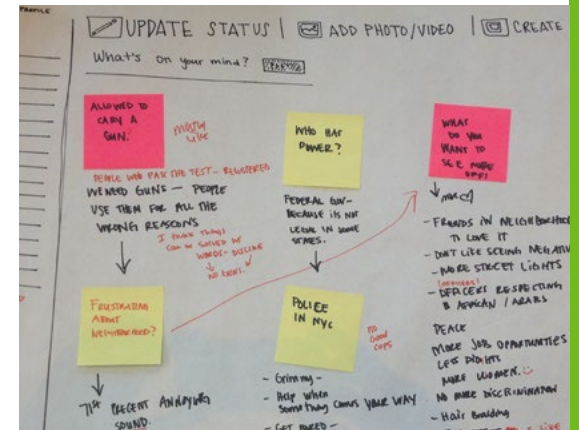
Main Learnings

Issues need to be identified by the students.

To make a meaningful connection students need to understand what they care about. This can only happen by reflecting on their own experiences. When they can take these experiences and then map them to the larger system their world view expands.

Peer-to-peer conversations drive topic areas

Students learn from each other's different perspectives. Through dialogue & debate they can fill gaps and create larger connections. When topic areas come from students they feel more confident enough to use each other to explore the issues areas.

Staff support is key

Student's at the YABC have a holistic support system. They are connected to staff multiple contexts. Acknowledging that a student transforms into an active citizen over time, staff need pathways to keep these meaningful conversations moving forward.

"You can't use big words because they don't know the meaning, then they don't want to talk to you. It intimidates them. Always use their language. —Yessenia

On the last day of our workshop, one staff member got excited enough to use our tools in a debate the next week, but lacking an understanding of our approach he was not completely successful. Instead of putting students at the center of the activity he lectured at them. This lead us to realizing that staff needed tools and support to carry on these conversations.

Deliver

You Are Here bridges the gap between the current experience of students and sustained participation.

Reflecting on our experiences within the YABC, You Are Here has been designed to be a modular approach, rather than an extensive curriculum that can fit into any youth development program.

Using this approach staff can help young adults develop the skills needed to connect local government to the wellbeing of their neighborhoods.

The approach is broken down into three parts. A Mindshift Roadmap, an Activity Library, and a set of facilitation principles—all which help students experience civic engagement starting with their perceive of the world and moving outward.

The Mindshift Road Map

In order to transform a student into an active citizen requires three skills. This roadmap breaks down the skills that a young person must hone in order to feel more connected to their community, and by extension their local government. Staff members are provided the below roadmap to guide how they pick and choose activities and plan their lessons.

The map provides set of action steps for each tactic, these action steps each correlate to an activity library so staff members can easily find tools and content. Actives range from icebreakers, group discussion and individual refection.

An inside-out approach that develops active citizens by helping young adults connect the issues they care about to local policy making.

BENEFITS OF YOU ARE HERE

Civics learning helps students become:

- Caring, supportive adults
- Positive members of their community
- Mature adults who understand their role

Equipping them with skills like:

- Problem solving
- Collaborative decision making
- Debate and compromise
- Civility and mutual respect
- Teamwork
- Analytical thinking
- Public speaking
- Deliberation and bridge building across differences
- Self-reflection

Mindshift Roadmap

	Learning Civic Ethos		Learning Civic Literacy		Learning Civic Inquiry	
	Who Are You?		**Connecting the Dots**		**You Are Here**	
Skill	Reflecting & acting upon your own values		Navigating complex systems		Thinking critically about your role in systems	
Tactic	Develop a sense of identity	Develop a sense of ownership of your values	Develop familiarity with key democratic processes	Understand communities as malleable systems	Identify shared values between you and your decision makers	Move from a passive citizen to active citizen
Action Step	Figure out what you care about

Seek, engage and evaluate multiple perspectives | Align your values with what you care about

Discover your stance on issues

Evaluate how your values affect others | Determine who gets it done and how.

Understand how are officials elected

Uncover how are laws made | Explore how your experiences reflect issues in the larger community

Discover who is working on improving your community | Who are you in relation to your community

Investigation and inquiry | Strike a reasonable balance between their own interests and the common good.

Recognize the importance of and practice civic duties |

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Next Steps

We have begun designing wireframes for a website to hold the approach. Ideally, we hope to build a community of practitioners around the You Are Here approach to civic engagement and believe that the internet is the best way to make the approach accessible across the country.

Interested programs will be able to access You Are Here online where they will find the Mindshift Roadmap, a collaborative Activity Library, and a set of Facilitation Principles.

Our goal for the Activity Library will be built out over time as more and more practitioners adopt this method. We have designed the road map to be flexible enough to allow anyone to take the theory and integrate it into their own work, but structured enough to help staff members understand where to start. Because of this, we envision the Activity Library becoming a place to share learnings and will build a community around it.

Currently the Library has been designed to hold instructions and tools that staff can print for different activities, but eventually the library will be built out to be robust resource subject matter content including current policy decisions, new laws, and diagrams of how local government works.

Based on the insights of working with the YABC, we also have found it necessary to design a set of Facilitation Principles. These principles are a glimpse into our process and help staff feel confident enough to guide discussions and activities in ways that empower students to become aware and curious. They also provide staff with tips and tricks for helping students untangle the complexity of local politics and how the issues they care about affect their local communities.
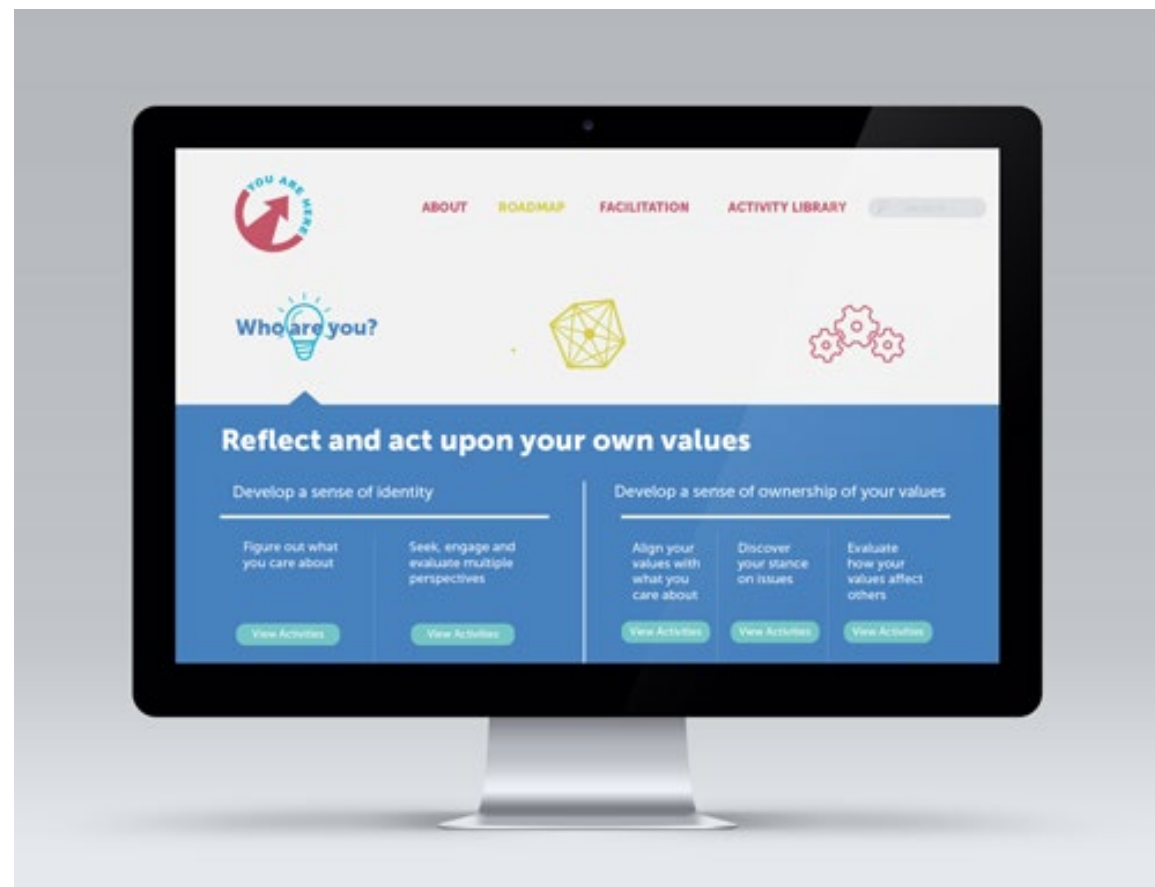
We successfully piloted this approach with 35 students. But, this is only the beginning. You Are Here provides a starting point for any youth organization to develop active citizens.

Imagine how different our cities would look when they are full of empowered, connected, and engaged citizens.

Cities where young people demand a say in decision-making and look at voting not as just dropping a piece of paper in a ballot box, to be forgotten, but as a symbol that they know that they are responsible for the well-being of their community.

Democracy starts and ends at a local level. With us. With caring about our neighbors, our streets, our districts, our boroughs, and our city. You Are Here is our attempt to transform this conversation, from the inside-out.

SVA NYC
DSI
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