

**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL:  
A Review of Youth Civic Engagement Efforts in 11 U.S. Cities**

**Summer in the City Program  
A Partnership Between  
Harvard University's Institute of Politics and the U.S. Conference of Mayors**

Former House Speaker Tip O'Neill liked to say that "all politics is local." At the Institute of Politics, we believe that political engagement often starts at the local level as well. Last summer, we joined with the U.S. Conference of Mayors to send a team of Harvard undergraduates to substantive summer internships in city governments across the country. This experience enriched these exceptional young citizens and they, in turn, contributed substantially to the municipalities they served.

We are delighted by the success of the Summer in the City Program. The impact of this venture continues to spread. We know that staying ahead of cynicism and apathy requires constant effort and continuous innovation. Seeking out and encouraging endeavors that expand political participation by young people is central to our mission. And no one can better scout out effective and promising methods of engaging young people than young people themselves. This report, compiled by the 2003 Summer in the City interns, presents some of the most successful initiatives and policies undertaken by American cities to engage young people in our political process.

I hope you enjoy and learn from this report, as much as our students enjoyed and learned from the experience of researching and writing it. Be assured that, already, a second group of Summer in the City interns is hard at work in cities across the country researching a 2004 report.

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**2003 SUMMER IN THE CITY PROGRAM:  
PARTICIPATING MAYORS AND HARVARD STUDENTS**

Akron Mayor Donald Plusquellic – Lyndsey Straight  
Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin – Damon King  
Baltimore Mayor Martin O’Malley – Anders Johnson  
Boston Mayor Thomas Menino – Michael Firestone  
Charlotte Mayor Patrick McCrory – Vida Harvey  
Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick – Adam Wiener  
Long Beach Mayor Beverly O’Neill – Joey Hanzich  
Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz – Rene Shen  
Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell – Lusi Fang  
Oakland (CA) Mayor Jerry Brown – Whitney Satin  
Washington (DC) Mayor Anthony Williams – Shelby Yu  
U.S. Conference of Mayors – Andrew McGee

Project Manager – Ilan Graff

## **Executive Summary**

The **Summer in the City** Program, a partnership between Harvard University's Institute of Politics and the U.S. Conference of Mayors was conceived as an effort to improve youth civic participation in city government. During the summer of 2003, a team of Harvard undergraduate students explored relevant programs in 11 cities. The best practices listed below and explained in this report are a synthesis of their findings. They are divided into four topic areas: Educational, Personal Contact, Direct Youth Participation, and Leadership Skills.

In reviewing these topical areas, several key themes emerged: first, the importance of direct mayoral interaction with young people as a means of inspiring them to political engagement; second, the need to emphasize programs that engage a broad swath of the community; and finally, the need to provide those youth who participate in city programs with meaningful responsibilities. It is our hope that this report can lead to the dissemination and replication of these and similar programs, so that today's youth are equipped with the political tools necessary for responsible citizenship.

## Introduction

“The reward of esteem, respect and gratitude [is] due,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, “to those who devote their time and efforts to render the youths of every successive age fit governors for the next.” The man who penned our *Declaration of Independence* was keenly aware of the immense value of a generation of young people equipped with the tools of responsible citizenship. When America faces challenges beyond the scope of even Jefferson’s fertile imagination, encouraging youth political engagement is no longer a matter of respect or gratitude, it is a social imperative.

Changes in the nation’s demographics necessitate a rethinking of the educational approaches Jefferson might have favored for the “nation of farmers” that he envisioned. In an era when more than 80 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas, it is clear that any widespread effort toward civically engaging youth must begin with the focal point of twenty-first century American life: cities. Fortunately, studies show that the challenge of involving a group traditionally perceived as apathetic in the workings of city government may not be as daunting as conventional wisdom holds.

In many respects, today’s youth are primed for participation. The 2002 Survey of Student Attitudes (SSA) conducted by Harvard University’s Institute of Politics found that 61 percent of college students claimed to have taken part in some form of community service in the past twelve months. This trend toward activism manifests itself in cities across the nation, as millions of young people make their presence felt in soup kitchens, neighborhood clean-ups, mentoring centers, and countless other youth-driven service initiatives.

However, the desire to effect positive social change has not yet been successfully translated into sustained political engagement. The SSA found that only 14 percent of college students had participated in a government or political organization over the same period of time. Such antipathy toward government service is consistent with other indicators of youth political engagement. The National Association of Secretaries of State reported that in 2000, only 33 percent of citizens aged 18-24 cast their votes in the presidential election.

There has been a wide variety of explanations offered for the surprising disconnect between public and community service. The disparity between young people’s desire to effect positive social change and their sense of the viability of participation in government as a means of doing so begs a number of serious questions. What does the future of American democracy hold, if the trend toward decreasing involvement in the political and governmental process continues? Equally important is the question of whether it is possible for this perception to be changed. If so, any public officials who successfully bridged this gap would tap into a powerful constituency. More importantly, they would give a generation of alienated Americans the skills it needs to confront the challenges of citizenship in the twenty-first century. Working toward this type of involvement means more than a vague commitment to the romantic notion of youth idealism. It represents nothing less than planting the seeds of change in the hearts and minds of millions of young Americans.

The answer to the all important feasibility question seems to be a resounding yes. The SSA revealed that, despite the fact that only 14 percent of respondents had recently participated in government or political service, 47 percent perceived those who did participate as “essentially the same as themselves.” In contrast, while 61 percent of students surveyed had participated in community service over the same time period, 67 percent saw other participants in this brand of engagement as similar to themselves. These data suggest that while community service has perhaps reached its saturation point among young activists in this country, the prospects for growth in youth political activity are strong. Equally significant is the fact that more than 90 percent of those surveyed identified contact with public officials as a “very” or “somewhat effective” way of bolstering youth involvement in political service.

For those civic leaders interested in ensuring the continued vibrancy of American democracy, these findings transform the question of engaging with youth from *whether* to pursue youth-oriented political programming to *how* to effectively construct programs that introduce young people to politics and encourage their meaningful involvement in government. Effectively addressing this question means returning to our cities. Enter the Summer in the City project.

Summer in the City, a collaborative effort of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and Harvard University’s Institute of Politics, was conceived as an effort to survey existing programs in this area, in order to develop a series of model practices for youth engagement in city government. In the summer of 2003, the program placed 11 Harvard undergraduate interns in mayors’ offices in Akron, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Detroit, Long Beach, Miami, Nashville, Oakland, and Washington, D.C. These students were charged with surveying the range of available youth programming in their respective cities and identifying those programs they considered worthy of replication elsewhere.

The data collected by the Summer in the City interns are synthesized in this report. Where there existed overlapping programs, as with Youth Councils, a representative sampling was included. This by no means represents the sum total of the massive amounts of information gathered by the 11 researchers. It is instead an effort to distill their vast body of work into a useful resource for city leaders interested in enhancing their offerings to young people.

The results are divided into four sections, representing the distinct areas of innovation that the research identified. **Educational** activities are primarily concerned with communicating a basic understanding of city government and/or local service opportunities, and means of participating in them, to younger citizens. **Personal Contact** programs connect youth to the operation of city government, whether through contact with an elected official, or through the establishment of convenient access points to city government for concerned young people. Efforts to encourage direct **Youth Participation** ensure active youth participation in some aspect of actual city governance. **Leadership Skills Training** programming is aimed at stimulating youth leadership among self-identified youth activists. These categories are certainly not mutually exclusive. A model metro government program, for example, aimed at training youth leaders, will likely also serve to educate them about government, while allowing for personal interaction with civic leaders. However, these groupings represent a useful means of presenting the multi-faceted findings of the project.

Each section includes a list and descriptions of model programs or approaches that give evidence of significant youth engagement. Appendix A presents a listing of national programs in this field that operate in some of the cities we explored. Appendix B provides contact information for the cities whose programs are introduced. It is a goal of the project that these model practices be disseminated and replicated or modified as appropriate.

## **Educational Programs**

**Boston – Youthline**

**Boston – Dunk the Vote**

**Charlotte – Center for Leadership and Global Economics**

**Detroit – [www.kidscopsclean.com](http://www.kidscopsclean.com)**

**Long Beach/Oakland – City/Voter Information Guides**

**Miami – Voter Registration**

**Oakland- Shining Stars**

Educational projects communicate basic information about city government and civic participation to younger citizens. Effectively educating young people opens the door to a lifetime of engagement in public life and equips frustrated youth with the tools they need to solve problems in their communities. Young people are often frustrated by the perceived opaqueness of local government and the lack of clear access points for youth interested in using government to effect change. Efforts by city leaders to resolve this problem can be stymied by a variety of factors, from the “digital divide” to limited attention spans. The following programs represent innovative approaches to overcoming some of these challenges and disseminating information about local government to young people.

**Boston, MA**

**Mayor Thomas M. Menino**

**Youthline**

Boston’s Youthline is a city office that works to connect young people to relevant programming, such as tutoring programs, summer jobs, mentoring, camps, and health lines. Interested individuals can either call in to “Youthline listeners,” or search the Youthline database on the web. Listeners are trained to direct young people to relevant city services and show them how the city can serve as a resource for them. Youthline serves as a convenient access point for youth who are concerned with a particular issue, but are not sure how it fits into the structure of Boston’s political process. The office is staffed by young people, making it an accessible peer-to-peer service. It is important to ensure that any project of this nature be publicized effectively, so that it can maximize its potential as a powerful resource for concerned youth.

**Boston, MA**

**Mayor Thomas M. Menino**

**Dunk the Vote**

Dunk the Vote, sponsored by the Boston subsidiary of the national Youth Vote Coalition, combines a basketball tournament with voter registration. By making voter information and registration available in a setting that appeals to youth, this event, and others like it, bring the tools of government to those who might not otherwise be exposed to them.

## **Charlotte, NC**

**Mayor Patrick McCrory**

### **Center for Leadership and Global Economics (CLGE)**

The CLGE is run in six magnet schools within the Charlotte Mecklenburg School System. The program has many components, including mock elections and conversations with students in Moscow, Berlin and Frankfurt. One key component is participants' interaction with the Mayor. The Mayor takes the agenda of the City Council, over which he presides, and picks an issue every semester for the students to study. The issues are always local, such as transportation or solid waste disposal. The students then take the remainder of the semester to study information on the topic and attend and/or watch council meetings. After doing research, the students then deliberate amongst themselves and get two hours to dialogue in person with the Mayor about their topic. These are question-and-answer sessions, which in the past have gotten heated and have turned into lessons in diplomatic confrontation. The Mayor's participation in this program allows students to receive a powerful education on the workings of city government by forcing them to apply the same problem-solving techniques that a city official might employ to problems relevant to their lives.

## **Detroit, MI**

**Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick**

**[www.kidscopsclean.com](http://www.kidscopsclean.com)**

Detroit website **[www.kidscopsclean.com](http://www.kidscopsclean.com)** serves as a one-stop shop for parents interested in locating one of more than 500 centers for after-school programming in the city. One valuable lesson from Detroit's experience is the importance of ensuring that hard copies of all information posted digitally are available at neighborhood civic centers, so that even those without computers can avail themselves of these resources.

## **Long Beach, CA/Oakland, CA**

**Mayor Beverly O'Neill and Mayor Jerry Brown**

### **Government/Voter Information Guides**

The City of Long Beach has prepared a pamphlet that presents interesting and essential facts about the City and its leaders along with games and other features designed to make it youth friendly. In Oakland, the Youth Commission has created a voter guide containing Oakland City candidates' positions on issues affecting youth, including violence and youth employment opportunities. Both publications, the former targeted *at* youth, the latter prepared *by* youth, disseminate important information about government in perhaps the simplest way imaginable. Making informational guides such as these available at city events or after-school programs represents a low-cost way of spreading the word about local officials and possibilities for civic engagement.

## **Miami, FL**

**Mayor Manuel Diaz**

### **Classroom Voter Registration**

In Miami, students who are 17 years old are eligible to register to vote. By using a School Board database, the Miami-Dade County School District is able to send out voter registration forms to high school government teachers of eligible students. Bringing registration to students in an environment where civic involvement can be both explained and encouraged allows large

numbers of students to overcome a major impediment (lack of voter registration) to youth voter turnout. An official estimated that between 11,000 and 17,000 students are registered to vote each year through this initiative. Clearly, classroom registration has the potential to radically increase young voter participation.

**Oakland, CA**

**Mayor Jerry Brown**

**Shining Stars**

The Shining Stars directory identifies public and private groups and services available to Oakland youth, including youth groups, empowerment organizations, cultural organizations and youth development organizations. In order to be listed in the directory, organizations must complete a one-page inventory that describes their program and provides detailed contact information. The guide is distributed through the Oakland Unified School System, and copies are made available to each community organization listed in the guide for further distribution. It is currently available in five languages.

## **Personal Contact Programs**

**Akron – “Do the Right Thing”**

**Atlanta – “Book-it-with-the Mayor”**

**Atlanta – Youthfest**

**Boston/Nashville – “Opening Day”/Mayor’s First Day Festival**

**Charlotte – Mayor’s Mentoring Alliance**

**Boston/Charlotte/ Nashville- Regular Classroom Visits**

**Miami – Paid leave to mentor students**

**Miami – Connecting on Issues**

The Institute’s SSA revealed that more than 90 percent of students believe that the interaction of public officials with young people breeds civic engagement. Many political scholars agree, asserting that direct contact with elected leaders can be more valuable than abstract civics lessons or visits to city hall, which are not accompanied by personal communication with civic leaders. The challenge for mayors is finding time in their busy schedules to interact with young people in settings that allow for substantive, meaningful interactions and/or informal opportunities for young people to get acquainted with their city leadership.

**Akron, OH**

**Mayor Don Plusquellic**

**Do the Right Thing**

This program allows the city of Akron to recognize students who are observed doing the right thing under difficult circumstances. Local educators nominate deserving students and the Police Department’s community relations department determines winners. Those who are honored receive a commendation, t-shirt, and gift certificates donated by local businesses. The awards ceremony is held in city council chambers and gives winners a chance to interact with the mayor, police chief, police officers, and other public servants. This program has the twofold advantage of recognizing good civic behavior and giving students a positive frame of reference for public officials and their local police department.

**Atlanta, GA**

**Mayor Shirley Franklin**

**Book-it-with-the-Mayor**

This program allows Atlanta’s mayor and other public officials to read to young children and make appearances at summer camps citywide. Such efforts on the part of mayors make them familiar presences in the lives of their young constituents, and reinforce the notion that elected leaders are both accessible to and concerned about young people.

**Atlanta, GA**

**Mayor Shirley Franklin**

**Youthfest**

This event is an attempt to strengthen and improve lines of communication with the youth of the city by involving the community in a day of games, activities, food, and entertainment.

**Boston, MA/Nashville, TN****Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Mayor Bill Purcell  
“Opening Day”/Mayor’s First Day Festival**

In Boston, government officials meet with students, school supplies in hand, on the first day of school to assist them in their important transition. Nashville has a similar, but more elaborate, program called the Mayor’s First Day Festival. It is designed to emphasize the celebration of starting school. It features family fun, educational entertainment, and free school supplies and snacks. Metro employees are given the day off to bring their students to the Festival (which is held shortly before school begins), and city employers are encouraged to let their workers out as well. In 2003, the event included a separate component with activities for teens, in addition to existing programming for younger students. Also, organizations are able to apply to have booths located at this festival to advertise the free opportunities they offer to the city’s children and youth. Both the Boston and Nashville programs bring young people into contact with city officials. In Nashville, the program also allows for the sort of interaction between youth, their families, and elected officials, the benefits of which are discussed in reference to Atlanta’s Youthfest. The emphasis on giving workers time off to attend helps ensure that events will draw participation from a broad array of the Nashville community. The mayor also encourages all parents to take their kids to school so that they have an opportunity to see the school facility, meet teachers and staff, and sign up to participate in a parent organization, and encourages employers to allow their employees extra time on the morning of the first day so that they may accompany their child to school. This is made possible, in part, by support from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce.

**Charlotte, NC****Mayor Patrick McCrory  
Mayor’s Mentoring Alliance**

This program allows for formal mentoring by city officials of young people throughout the city. Such mentoring programs bring government workers into contact with young people and ensure a sustained relationship. Thus, their ability to induce youth to participate in the political process is significant. Beyond this, of course, mentors serve to positively impact the lives of the young people in ways that likely have an indirect bearing on civic engagement.

**Boston, MA/Charlotte, NC/Nashville, TN****Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Mayor Patrick McCrory, and Mayor Bill Purcell  
Regular Classroom Visits**

The mayors of Boston, Charlotte, and Nashville, along with many of their colleagues across the nation, make a regular practice of visiting schools in their metropolitan region. Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell, for example, visited all 127 metropolitan schools at least twice during his first term as mayor. School visits represent a relatively easy way of making contact with a wide range of metropolitan youth. While it may not always be immediately apparent, such visits have the potential to have a tangible impact on students’ development as engaged citizens.

**Miami, FL****Mayor Manuel Diaz  
Paid Leave to Mentor Students**

As part of his citywide mentoring initiative, Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz provided city employees with one hour of paid leave per week to mentor a child. This program, conducted in partnership

with Big Brothers and Big Sisters, allows government workers to serve as valuable role models for young people during these critical school years. By ensuring that individuals involved with city programming will participate in the mentoring process, this program guarantees that young people across the city will come into positive contact with individuals involved in the process of administering their local government, an interaction that stands to influence them to participate in political action.

## **Miami, FL**

### **Mayor Manuel Diaz**

#### **Connecting on Issues**

One of the most effective means of ensuring meaningful interaction between elected officials and young people is engaging with them on relevant issues. As a consequence of Miami's relatively high HIV/AIDS infection rates, the disease is on the minds of many of the metropolitan area's young people. In an effort to further understanding of this issue, the Mayor's office organized a daylong youth conference that coincided with National HIV Testing Day. As part of the day's events, Mayor Diaz addressed a crowd of approximately 1,000 high school students. This event provides a striking example of young people gaining exposure to their mayor, while also gaining an understanding of how his work pertains to their lives. Issue conferences of this nature, on any of a number of topics that pertain to youth, are a critical means of ensuring interaction between elected officials and young people. Tailoring such events to the concerns of local youth allows elected officials to demonstrate the importance of local government to their youngest constituents.

## **Youth Participation Programs**

**Baltimore – Mayoral Fellowship Program**

**Detroit – Mayor’s Youth Summit**

**Long Beach – Groundhog Shadow Day**

**Miami – Paid Internships in City Departments**

**Miami – Work at Polling Places**

**Nashville – Mayor’s Summit on Children and Youth**

**Nashville – Nashville Youth Alliance**

**Oakland – Kids First! Initiative**

**Washington, DC – Children Youth Investment Trust /Private Sector Partnership**

**Washington, DC – Tax Incentives to Encourage Internships**

**Various – Service Requirement**

**Various- Youth Council/Congress/Advisory Board**

**Various – Youth on Commissions**

Often, the best way to inspire long-term engagement is to empower students by involving them directly in matters of city governance. It is important when doing so to make a distinction between commissions intended to *serve* youth and those composed *of* youth. While the latter may sometimes contribute to the former, the existence of a board of youth advisers is no substitute for a group of experts dedicated to youth programming. Regardless, soliciting youth participation in the development of projects geared toward issues of concern to young people can be an invaluable step on the road to sustained political participation.

### **Baltimore, MD**

**Mayor Martin O’Malley**

**Mayoral Fellowship Program**

This program is made available to approximately 18 student interns (half undergraduate and half graduate) in Baltimore city offices. Interns meet once a week for a luncheon where they hear from speakers, usually prominent state or local officials. This series illustrates the type of supplementary programming that can make a government internship more meaningful for participants. Speakers, service activities, or other events can dramatically improve a summer or term-time intern’s experience.

### **Detroit, MI**

**Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick**

**Mayor’s Youth Summit**

The Detroit Mayor’s Youth Summit grew out of an effort to gather youth and community leaders for a discussion of neighborhood safety. As part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, city officials contacted many community-based organizations and asked them each to recommend two young people to participate, thus ensuring a broad cross-section of Detroit’s population would be present. The students met with Mayor Kilpatrick in a town hall style meeting, which was

televised on local cable. The event was so successful that the city intends to institutionalize it, making it an annual component of Detroit's youth programming.

### **Long Beach, CA**

#### **Mayor Beverly O'Neill**

##### **Groundhog Shadow Day**

On Groundhog Day, the City of Long Beach sponsors a program in which students in grades 4 through 11 shadow a worker in a business or city department for a day. Mayor Beverly O'Neill has been an active participant in this program, not only allowing students to shadow her, but also addressing a luncheon that the Workforce Development Bureau puts on for the job shadow participants. Several hundred young people participate in this program, which gives them exposure both to the work experience of local adults and the operation of city government.

### **Miami, FL**

#### **Mayor Manuel Diaz**

##### **Paid Internships in City Departments**

Budgeting for summer or term-time intern salaries removes a major obstacle to widespread youth participation in this type of program: opportunity cost. Many young people who have not yet been exposed to local government cannot afford to sacrifice a summer's earnings to pursue an internship with a city department. Miami boasts a policy supporting payment of public service interns, thus making youth involvement more attractive and feasible.

### **Miami, FL**

#### **Mayor Manuel Diaz**

##### **Work at Polling Places**

In Miami, students are able to take the day off from school on Election Day to help staff local polling places. The opportunity to observe the democratic process in action may contribute to young people eventually choosing to cast their own ballots in future elections. One challenge that this and similar programs face is ensuring that it is not only those students already interested in politics who participate. Offering school credit or exemption from related assignments may serve as an incentive for broader participation.

### **Nashville, TN**

#### **Mayor Bill Purcell**

##### **Mayor's Summit on Children and Youth**

The first annual Mayor's Summit on Children and Youth was held in Nashville in April of 2003. This event brought together experts and community leaders to discuss how the city can do more for kids. The efforts of these individuals to develop effective youth programming were complemented by the concurrent staging of the Mayor's Youth Summit, which is a teen planned and attended event. Holding regular gatherings, under the auspices of city government, that bring together practitioners of youth-related activities allows for constant innovation in the field of youth programming. The development of new and ever more effective means of reaching young people ensures that all programs geared toward civic participation (as well as other types of youth programming) will maximize their potential as city-sponsored activities.

## **Nashville, TN**

### **Mayor Bill Purcell**

#### **Mayor's Office of Children and Youth**

Nashville's Office of Children and Youth was created in 2002. Its mission is to work in partnership with public and private entities to ensure that all of Nashville's children are healthy, safe, and successful in school, and connected to caring adults, allowing them the opportunity to contribute to the progress of the city. Since its establishment, it has proved to be of tremendous help to the city in terms of organizing and staffing initiatives that would have otherwise never come to full fruition. The existence of such an office, with a Director, Youth Development Specialist, and Early Childhood Specialist, ensures that there will always be an institutional home for any programming pertaining to youth civic engagement. The office also maintains a user-friendly website at [www.nashville.gov/mocy/index.htm](http://www.nashville.gov/mocy/index.htm), which provides easy access to information about the city's youth programming.

## **Oakland, CA**

### **Mayor Jerry Brown**

#### **Kids First! Initiative**

The Kids First! Initiative allocated an estimated \$6.8-\$7.2 million per year of the city's unrestricted General Fund to youth programming over a period of twelve years, beginning in 1996. Supporters of the initiative hoped to create a network of services aimed at measurably improving the lives of children and youth in Oakland. While the total budget set aside for youth activities (including those pertaining to civic engagement) is widely different from city to city, establishing a consistent source of funding for such programming ensures its sustainability over the long term. The fact that Kids First! was passed by 75 percent of Oakland voters suggests that such funding proposals can be enormously popular.

## **Various**

### **Service Requirement**

Nationwide, many school districts have a service requirement for graduation. The viability of such a requirement varies from city to city. However, where possible, cities should consider institutionalizing mandatory, city-sponsored community service requirements that can be fulfilled through volunteer participation in a government organization, engage students in political action at an early age, and nurture their interest in public service. Oakland Unified School District, for example, has a 20-hour minimum 'service learning,' or community service, mandate in order for students to graduate.

## **Various**

### **Youth Council/Congress/Advisory Board**

Nearly all of the cities that participated in the Summer in the City project have or have had some form of youth council. The existence of such a body, generally composed of local high school students, can often involve fifty-plus students in the planning and execution of youth-related events. The council can also serve as a sounding board for the mayor on youth issues.

There are several components of an effective youth council. First, it must be composed of a representative sample of a city's young people, so that it can operate as a microphone for them. In Nashville, the Mayor's Youth Council is composed of high school juniors and seniors who are

representative of the geographic, racial and ethnic diversity of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County. Government programs might be well served by working more closely with school systems in efforts to involve youths in the government and in community service. Partnering with schools or community organizations can be one way to ensure a diversity of representation on a youth council.

Once a group of youths has been assembled, it is important to vest it with real responsibility. While grateful for the opportunities they are provided, students may bemoan a perceived “tokenized” role and demand more substance to their participation. Young people have to feel that their suggestions and input are valued and taken into account. For cities in search of ways to maximize local resources in the creation of a youth council, partnering with local organizations can be a means of developing similar programming. Baltimore’s Youth Congress, for example, was formed and is administered by the University of Maryland Law School, with the cooperation of the Mayor’s Office of Youth, Children and Families. Such partnerships can help defray the cost of youth councils, while bringing in experts for youth civic engagement programming.

It is important to remember that participants in Youth Councils often must weigh their participation against a myriad of other curricular, extracurricular, and social activities. Many respondents to the Summer in the City survey pointed to the busy schedules of young people as a major impediment to youth participation in programs such as youth councils or shadow governments. Perhaps the best way to counteract this drain on students’ time is to ensure that their time spent on Youth Council related activities is worthwhile.

Finally, it is important not to regard the mere existence of a Youth Council as a panacea for youth civic engagement. Besides the numerous challenges discussed above, leaders of cities with youth councils need to remember that no matter how many meetings a youth council holds, the only students it engages in political discourse on a regular basis are the members of the council. Furthermore, those students who apply for membership on a youth council are likely those who are *already* motivated for government action. This is not to suggest that youth councils are trivial or unnecessary. To the contrary, they can be a powerful advisory and plenary body. However, they are most effective when instituted in concert with other programs and activities aimed at inspiring a wider range of students to sustained civic engagement.

## **Washington, DC**

### **Mayor Anthony Williams**

#### **Children Youth Investment Trust (CYIT) /Private Sector Partnership**

Created in 1998, the trust works to link public and private resources to address strategically the long-term needs of children, youth and families. Drawing its funding from DC’s general revenue, federal grants, business donations, and a national foundation, the CYIT represents an innovative means of confronting the challenge of funding both city and non-profit youth organizations. This challenge has been addressed elsewhere by such measures as Oakland’s Kids First! Initiative. The District of Columbia has also successfully partnered with other organizations in an effort to fund programs that foster youth civic engagement. The District’s local effort as part of National Youth Service Day was funded, in part, by such organizations as the Washington Redskins Cheerleaders, the Washington Freedom, and Nike.

## **Washington, DC**

### **Mayor Anthony Williams**

#### **Tax Incentives to Encourage Internships**

The District of Columbia offers tax incentives to businesses that provide opportunities for young people. Net 2000 Affordable Facilities is a local tax incentive that defrays facility costs of qualified companies by providing funding assistance for security deposits and making certain schools or government properties available for lease. Among the qualifications for this incentive is the stipulation that a company provides student employment, internships, or other training and assistance to DC Public Schools. The tax incentives combine with subsidies for student wages through the Department of Employment Services to create opportunities for youths. While these internships or employment opportunities do not directly relate to youth civic engagement, the notion of using tax incentives to create opportunities for youth to assume positions of responsibility throughout the community is one that should be examined and possibly applied to relevant service organizations.

## **Various**

### **Youth on Commissions**

Another worthwhile means of involving young people in civic governance is allowing them to sit on local boards and commissions. As with youth advisory boards, serving on a city commission gives a young person the opportunity to see how the work of government relates to his/her life. It also allows for youth input into government programming, which helps ensure that government programming will be relevant to the lives of young people.

There are many examples of successful addition of young people onto city commissions. In Nashville, the Mayor's Youth Council is responsible for appointing youth liaisons to the Metropolitan Government Board of Health, Metropolitan Transit Authority, Metropolitan Nashville Arts Commission, Metropolitan Social Services Commission, Metropolitan Government Board of Parks and Recreation, Educational Access Corporation, and the Metropolitan Government Public Library Board. In Washington DC, the HIV and AIDS Administration is working to involve youths in every aspect of their programs. Washington's youth can also serve on the Workforce Investment Council, a bipartisan effort to consolidate and streamline employment and training programs. In Long Beach, our intern helped craft a youth ordinance that would create a youth commission, which would include the participation of a number of young people, as well as experienced city leaders. The Long Beach Police Chief also maintains a youth advisory board, as do police, fire, and health services in numerous metropolitan communities.

## **Leadership Skills Training Programs**

**Akron – Lock 3 SAE**

**Baltimore – New Light Leadership Coalition**

**Boston/Washington, DC – Global Youth Parliament**

**Long Beach – Neighborhood Leadership Program**

**Nashville – Nashville Youth Leadership**

**Oakland – Summer Legal Fellowship**

**Washington, DC – Mayor’s Youth Leadership Institute**

To this point, programming suggestions have been primarily limited to means of engaging youth who have not yet expressed a passion for political participation. But, cities must also be prepared to feed the interests of those students who are motivated to participate in government and are looking for opportunities to develop their nascent curiosity. Youth Councils represent one means of doing so. The following programs are other approaches for equipping self-identified youth civic leaders with the skills necessary to achieve their visions.

### **Akron, OH**

**Mayor Donald Plusquellic**

#### **Lock 3 Summer Arts Experience**

Modeled after Chicago’s Gallery 37, Akron’s Lock 3 Summer Arts Experience was inaugurated last summer. The program provides high school students who are talented in the arts with the opportunity to develop their abilities, while working with a professional artist. It also has a work readiness component that allows students to explore career options in the arts and teaches them financial management, resume writing, and portfolio assembly skills. While this program is not directly related to civic engagement, it is staffed in large part by city employees, and, in the future, the mayor will address participants in the program. The potential for this type of program to tap into a talented, dedicated group of students, and expose them to the value of political participation (even through indirect means) is clear.

### **Baltimore, MD**

**Mayor Martin O’Malley**

#### **New Light Leadership Coalition**

The New Light Leadership Coalition is a Baltimore-based non-profit that hosts and sponsors four national youth leadership conferences centered on such issues as economic development and political issues and how they are related to youth interests. NLLC projects, such as their “Youth Empowerment Movement,” benefit from association with Baltimore’s Mayor’s Office of Youth Children and Families, which provides both financial and advisory support. Forming this type of partnership with local organizations allows mayors to “sublet” responsibility for youth leadership training programs to agencies that specialize in the field, while still allowing for direct, meaningful interaction between the mayor and his staff, and participants in the program.

**Boston, MA/Washington, DC****Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Mayor Anthony Williams****Global Youth Parliament**

Global Metro City hosts the Globalization Conference in Washington DC, in an effort to focus on a new approach for balancing the opportunities of globalization with local interests and values. Boston and Washington have so far been the only U.S. cities to receive funding from GMC for participation in the Global Youth Parliament component of this program. This is one example of how cities can get motivated young people substantively involved in national and international organizations.

**Long Beach, CA****Mayor Beverly O'Neill****Neighborhood Leadership Program**

In 1991, the City of Long Beach created the Neighborhood Leadership program as a means of training local residents in the skills they need to understand and address problems faced by their communities. While this particular program is intended for adult residents, similar programming, explicitly geared toward equipping youth with the political tools they need to cope effectively with challenges confronting their neighborhoods, represents an intriguing possibility for the engagement of motivated metropolitan youth.

**Nashville, TN****Mayor Bill Purcell****Nashville Youth Leadership**

According to a report, "Nashville Youth Leadership is a unique leadership opportunity for a selected 40 high school sophomores. NYL provides leadership training through monthly sessions focusing on skills development, current issues, community service, and exploration of Nashville's history, institutions, and culture. A key emphasis of this program is the development of a diverse community of teens from across Nashville. During the year the students attend an opening reception, an overnight retreat, seven program days (one per month), and a closing graduation." Among the many aspects of this programming worthy of duplication, is its long-term engagement of participating youth. Many one-shot or otherwise short-term offerings fail to draw enthusiasm from their participants, as they are drowned out by a cacophony of curricular and extra-curricular student commitments.

**Oakland, CA****Mayor Jerry Brown****Summer Legal Fellowship**

As with other aspects of youth-related programming, the key to a successful venture can be a worthwhile partnership with relevant local organizations. Colleges and universities can be particularly valuable resources, when seeking to educate and inspire motivated youth. Oakland's Summer Legal Fellowship is a prime example of a program that makes good use of the neighboring University of California in Berkeley. The Summer Legal Fellowship Program was developed in 1995 as part of The Center for Youth Development through Law at UC Berkeley School of Law. Each summer, 26 East Bay high school students from low-income backgrounds attend lectures on legal topics, practical life skills workshops, and conflict management training and participate in paid internships in law and government offices. Program graduates receive the

benefits of continued life skills workshops and one-on-one mentoring. The program hopes to inspire students to pursue higher education and eventually law or government careers and works to provide the necessary skills and support to enable each student to achieve these goals. The Fellowship also encourages youth to actively participate in civic democracy. Both the structural model and the curriculum of this program are valuable for the intensity of their engagement of young people who would not otherwise have this opportunity to pursue their pre-existing interest in civic activity.

**Washington, DC**

**Mayor Anthony Williams**

**Mayor's Youth Leadership Institute**

Washington DC's Mayor's Youth Leadership Institute is an example of a program that combines a wide array of educational experiences: mock government, shadowing, discussions with local leaders, and more, as part of a year-round program for developing youth leadership. Founded in 1979, the training model emphasizes practical hands-on experiences with a holistic approach to developing leaders of the 21st century. The program includes both a summer and year-round component, which allows it to engage youth over the long-term and equip them with the wide array of skills necessary to assume leadership roles in their communities.

## **Appendix A: A Sampling of Nationwide Programs**

Many cities have benefited from partnering with umbrella groups that work to increase youth civic engagement nationwide. A listing of some of the national programs that operate in a number of our individual cities is provided below. Web contact information is included.

**America's Promise**

[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

**City Year**

[www.cityyear.org](http://www.cityyear.org)

**City Cares**

[www.citycares.org](http://www.citycares.org)

**Kids Voting USA**

[www.kidsvotingusa.org](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org)

**Weed & Seed** (sponsored by the Department of Justice)

[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/)

**Youth Opportunity System** (YO! Baltimore is a representative program of this broader effort)

[www.yobaltimore.org](http://www.yobaltimore.org)

**Youth as Resources** (YAR)

[www.yar.org](http://www.yar.org)

**Youth Leadership Initiative** (offered by the University of Virginia Center for Politics)

[www.youthleadership.net](http://www.youthleadership.net)

**Youth Vote Coalition**

[www.youthvote.org](http://www.youthvote.org)

**Appendix B:**  
**Summer in the City Participant Contact Information**

Akron, OH: [www.ci.akron.oh.us/](http://www.ci.akron.oh.us/)  
Atlanta, GA: [www.ci.atlanta.ga.us/](http://www.ci.atlanta.ga.us/)  
Baltimore, MD: [www.ci.baltimore.md.us/](http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/)  
Boston, MA: [www.cityofboston.gov](http://www.cityofboston.gov)  
Charlotte, NC: [www.charmeck.nc.us](http://www.charmeck.nc.us)  
Detroit, MI: [www.ci.detroit.mi.us](http://www.ci.detroit.mi.us)  
Long Beach, CA: [www.ci.long-beach.ca.us](http://www.ci.long-beach.ca.us)  
Miami, FL: [www.ci.miami.fl.us](http://www.ci.miami.fl.us)  
Nashville, TN: [www.nashville.gov](http://www.nashville.gov)  
Oakland, CA: [www.oaklandnet.com](http://www.oaklandnet.com)  
Washington, DC: [www.dc.gov](http://www.dc.gov)

Harvard's Institute of Politics: [www.iop.harvard.edu](http://www.iop.harvard.edu)  
U.S. Conference of Mayors: [www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org)