

Democracy Program Strategic Overview

A healthy democracy is dependent upon informed and engaged individuals and communities, and responsive systems of government

The McCormick Foundation introduces a refreshed Democracy Program strategy. Our work focuses on youth civic engagement, journalism, and governmental reform, and takes place at three levels of our democratic system in Illinois: individual, community, and systems. Individuals engage with one another to solve problems in their communities. They work within democratic systems to resolve them or to reform the systems themselves, ultimately to the benefit of both individuals and their communities.



Partners and grantees of the Foundation will recognize significant continuity in our strategy. We continue to support youth civic development through a range of investments in civic learning opportunities and our own Democracy Schools Initiative. Our commitment to journalism also remains robust across a continuum that encompasses youth media, healthy local news ecosystems, and investigative reporting. And we still seek to make public institutions more accessible, responsive, and representative.

Changes center on the integration of these previously distinct strategies in the democratic context of individuals, communities, and systems. Youth engagement, local journalism, and institutional reform provide opportunities to work at all three levels of our democracy to improve its functioning. Additionally, we will be more purposeful about the reinforcing nature of these strategies.

Moreover, this strategic refresh represents a deeper commitment to racial equity and serving under-resourced communities in Chicagoland and throughout Illinois. We seek to improve overall democratic outcomes and close the civic empowerment gap by providing resources, creating opportunities, and advocating for policies to address disparities for people of color.

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Our Mission

Strengthen democracy in Illinois through informed and engaged individuals and communities, and responsive systems of government

Our Goals

- Youth are informed, actively participate in their communities, and have healthy civic dispositions
- Journalism is vigorous and free, and an effective mediator, informing and connecting all levels of the democratic system
- Public institutions are inclusive, transparent, and accountable to the communities they serve

To foster the civic development of the next generation of individuals, communities and governmental systems in Illinois, three strategies work at these levels of our democracy to improve its functioning (current and recommended grants, along with direct programming, are embedded within each respective strategy):

Strategy #1: Engage youth

Youth are informed, actively participate in their communities, and have healthy civic dispositions

- *Individuals*: Engage youth, inside and outside school settings, to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors for lifelong civic engagement, via partners and programs[&]
 - Civics course and social studies standards implementation[&]
 - Democracy Schools[&]
 - Alternative Schools Network
 - Barat Education Fund
 - Chicago History Fair[#]
 - CPS Department of Social Science and Civic Engagement[#]
 - Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago
 - Facing History and Ourselves
 - Golden Apple Foundation[#]
 - Mikva Challenge
 - News Literacy Project
 - Roosevelt Institute
 - Stanford History Education Group[#]
 - We Schools
- *Communities*: Youth identify common interests, collaborate with peers, and collectively elevate issues and seek solutions
 - Chicago Freedom School
 - Chicago Cares
 - Interfaith Youth Core
 - My Hood, My Block, My City[#]
- *Systems*: Youth advocate for and help implement solutions to issues elevated in collaboration with their peers
 - Chicago Votes
 - Communities United (Voices of Youth in Chicago Education)
 - Illinois Coalition for Youth and Refugee Rights

Indicates a 2017 grant

Strategy #2: Support local journalism

Journalism is vigorous and free, and is an effective mediator, informing and connecting all levels of the democratic system

- *Individuals*: Build the capacity of individual journalists, *youth included, to engage with and report on local issues
 - Chicago Community Trust (Hive Chicago)*
 - Chicago Youth Voices Network*#
 - Community Television Network*
 - DePaul University*#
 - National Museum of Mexican American Art (Difusion Media)*
 - Free Spirit Media*
 - Poynter Institute
 - True Star Foundation*
 - Urban Gateways (Street-Level Youth Media)*
 - Westside Writing Project*#
 - Young Chicago Authors*#
- *Communities*: Promote media engagement with communities to support news and information reflective of their needs
 - Chalkbeat#
 - Chicago Data Journalism Cooperative#
 - Chicago Public Media#
 - Chicago Reporter
 - City Bureau
 - Medill Social Justice Initiative#
 - Public Narrative
 - University of Texas Engaging News Project#
- *Systems*: Enhance the capacity of the local news ecosystem by supporting development of strong, stable news organizations
 - Columbia Journalism Review#
 - Illinois Public Media#
 - Institute for Nonprofit News
 - Medill Knight Innovation Lab#
 - Medill National Security Initiative#
 - Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting#
 - Pro Publica Illinois
 - Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
 - Student Press Law Center

Indicates a 2017 grant

Strategy #3: Pursue institutional reform

Institutions are accessible, representative of the communities they serve, and responsive to constituent needs with inclusive policies

- *Individuals*: Create high capacity civic leaders who can engage effectively with individuals and communities
 - ADA 25 Advancing Leadership Institute[^]
 - Latino Policy Forum (Multicultural Leadership Academy)[^]
 - University of Chicago (Civic Leadership Academy)
- *Communities*: Help build the civic capacity of institutions in underserved communities
 - Citizen Advocacy Center
 - Civic Consulting Alliance
 - Forefront
 - Metropolitan Planning Council
 - University of Illinois-Chicago (Participatory Budgeting Project)
- *Systems*: Support and implement public policies that make government institutions transparent, inclusive, and accountable
 - Better Government Association
 - CHANGE Illinois
 - Chicago Lawyers Committee
 - Civic Federation
 - Common Cause Illinois[#]
 - Communities United[#]
 - Illinois Business Immigration Coalition[#]
 - Illinois Campaign for Political Reform
 - Illinois PIRG
 - Truth in Accounting

Indicates a 2017 grant

[^] Currently funded out of another McCormick Foundation program