

PropelNext In Action

Generation Citizen

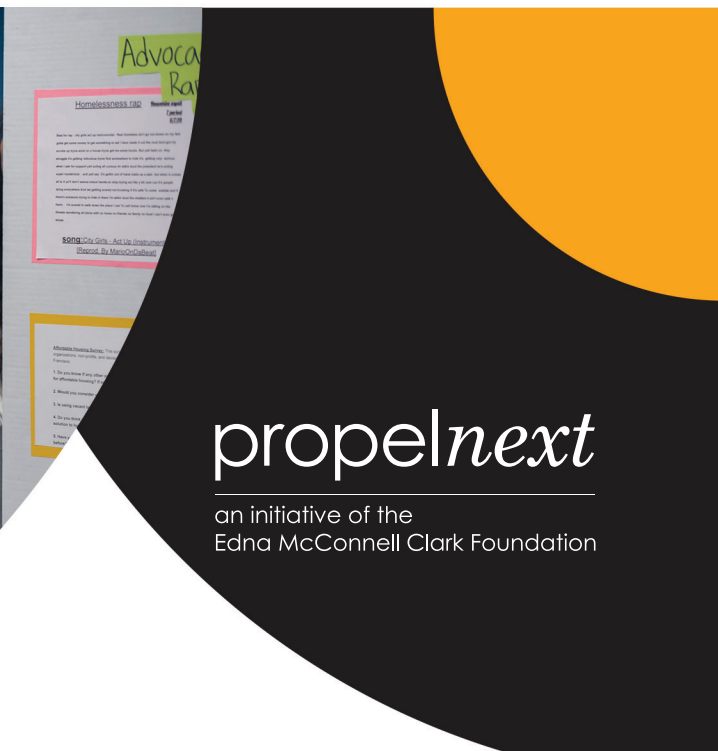
A healthy democracy depends on robust political participation, but according to Scott Warren, founder and CEO of Generation Citizen in San Francisco, our civic life is stuck in a harmful pattern: as decision-makers prioritize the demands of their most politically active constituents, young people – especially low-income young people – are frustrated and disillusioned by politics and do not participate at the same level as other demographics.

Founded in 2008 when Warren was a college senior, Generation Citizen inspires civic participation through a proven state standards-

aligned curriculum that gives students the opportunity to experience real-world democracy.

“Generation Citizen is about empowering young people across the country to be active and engaged citizens through ‘action civics’ and engaging in the political process,” Warren said. Through student-driven projects, youth learn how to effect policy change by engaging with local governments and leaders to solve community problems.

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Specifically, Generation Citizen’s democracy coach model is a near-peer mentorship initiative that is central to the organization’s action civics curriculum. Democracy coaches are college volunteers who are paired with secondary school teachers to lean an in-school action civics curriculum. Democracy coaches serve as motivators and mentors for students, conduct in-depth research on a community issue chosen by students, and offer perspective on the college application process and student experience.

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Working with PropelNext, Generation Citizen is becoming more of a learning organization, pressed to ask tough questions about what it means to be an effective program. “PropelNext really pushes folks to go in deep on fleshing out and

getting very specific about what an effective program looks like,” according to Warren.

PropelNext comes at an opportune time for Generation Citizen, as the organization is about to embark on a new 3-year strategic planning process. While their work with PropelNext is focusing specifically on their democracy coach volunteer program, Warren said the lessons learned will be used to inform what programming is prioritized moving forward.

“Hopefully the muscles that PropelNext is helping us to develop in terms of becoming a learning organization and a culture that values it are something that’s a part of the strategic plan as well,” Warren said.

Moving forward, Generation Citizen is taking a different approach to scaling their model by going deeper with the youth they’re currently working with. As Warren explained, “At first, we scaled fast in terms of working with a lot of students, and now we’re thinking critically about what it means to work with our target population. We want to ensure we’re having the greatest impact on the youth we are serving.”

PropelNext is a program of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation that helps promising nonprofits convert their passion for serving disadvantaged youth into data-driven insights and practices that increase their impact on young people’s lives. This is a look into Generation Citizen, a PropelNext grantee in their Northern California 2021 cohort, and the organization’s experience thus far in the program. The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation is the co-investor for Generation Citizen.