



**36th Annual
National Conference
Scottsdale, AZ**

2021 Professional Practices Program

Insights from High School Poll Workers Minneapolis, MN

Submitted by:

**Caryn Scheel
SEJ Program Coordinator
City of Minneapolis
Elections & Voter Services
Minneapolis, MN 55414
612-673-3870
caryn.scheel@minneapolismn.gov
vote.minneapolismn.gov**

Minneapolis Student Election Judge Partnership

Teens can be powerful allies for elections administrators and those working to make voting accessible to the youngest eligible voters. For nearly 30 years, Minneapolis has engaged high school students as poll workers. They have brought energy, technological savvy, and diverse language skills to polling places across the city. And increasingly, these high school students have been asking to be engaged in additional ways. This project was designed to help make use of that desire.

This youth participatory action research project involved the collaborative efforts of Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services, the YMCA of the North's Center for Youth Voice, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life, Auburn University, and the Civic Scholars, a group of high school students and recent graduates from Minneapolis and the surrounding suburbs. Financial support from the Democracy Fund made this project possible, and in-kind consulting from ideas42 supported the work.

The goal for this project, which began in May 2020, was to empower a diverse group of local youths to develop leadership and professional skills while they helped our organizations better understand how young people develop civic skills and voices. We recruited applicants from Minneapolis student election judges and students who participated in the YMCA of the North's Youth in Government program to apply to work with us as Civic Scholars. We had 90 applicants for ten positions.

With guidance and mentorship from the adults, ten Civic Scholars participated in three projects:

1. **Research the benefits to youth of serving as poll workers.** The Civic Scholars worked with CIRCLE and Auburn University to learn about research best practices with human subjects and then created a survey to evaluate the experiences of student election judges during the 2020 general election. Under the guidance of Dr. Bridgett King at Auburn University, the Scholars crafted survey questions and piloted them with students who served as student election judges for the August 2020 primary. They then revised the questions and conducted pre- and post-election surveys with teens who worked in Minneapolis polling places for the 2020 general election. A total of 133 youth election judges responded to the pre-election survey, and 147 to the post-election survey. Scholars used data from the surveys to write a series of briefs and recommendations for the media, for school administrators and teachers, and for election administrators.
2. **Improve how adults work with youth in the polling place.** Civic Scholars analyzed three years of student poll worker evaluations to gain insight on the common problems polling place leadership identified in working with youth, and how teens perceived the polling place leadership. Under the guidance of Amy Anderson from the YMCA of the North Center for Youth Voice, they came up with a list of recommendations for adults to work more effectively with youths, and they scripted and performed in a video to help adults address some of the most common points of friction. The video was distributed to the Minnesota Student Election Judge Network and will be part of an ongoing toolkit to help election administrators recruit and support high school students.
3. **Educate new voters on Vote by Mail.** Civic Scholars immersed themselves in how the process of voting by mail works in Minnesota, touring facilities for an overview of the process, and

attended work sessions with ideas42, a nonprofit design and consulting firm that uses insights from the behavioral sciences to address complex social problems, including voting misinformation. The Scholars applied what they learned about effective visual communication and crafted messages to share within their school networks about how to vote by mail during a pandemic—and how to register to vote.

The ten Civic Scholars worked on these three projects over the summer, and four continued to work for the entire year, concluding the project in June 2021. They analyzed the results of the student election judge survey and collected additional insights from students, parents, and their teachers.

In April, they participated in a Humphrey School of Public Affairs event commemorating Minnesota being the first state to ratify the 26th Amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18. They wrote three briefs aimed at different audiences that distilled what they learned over the course of their work into recommendations for educators, election administrators, and the general public. These briefs (see the Supporting Documents) were released by CIRCLE on June 3, 2021, and the Scholars and partners showcased the work through their communications and social media, and within Minnesota's Student Election Judge Network members.

Based on this year-long engagement, here are some of the major findings:

- Nearly 70% of student election judges said the experience helped them understand the voting process “a great deal,” and nearly 100% of those respondents who were at least 18 years of age indicated that they planned to vote in the 2020 Presidential Election.
- Two-thirds of student election judges felt they were improving things in their community; 76% said they felt their service helped to ensure all members of their community could vote and 59% said they had gained practical, real-world job skills from the experience.
- The number of student election judges at a given precinct was significantly correlated with estimated voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds and may have been especially important in more diverse precincts.

The impact of this project goes beyond the individual products the Civic Scholars advanced. The work of this group inspired Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services to expand its programming to include youth volunteers more systematically in voter education and outreach. Called Elections Ambassadors, this group of 25 high school students commit to meeting regularly with Minneapolis Elections staff to learn more about elections and government, and give input on a variety of voting-relating projects. In 2021, students will learn from city and state experts on topics such as election law, outreach and communication, exhibit design, and project management. They are leading on community-based art projects for our public space, voter outreach efforts at local high schools, and co-creating a workshop for social studies teachers attending the National Council for the Social Studies to include poll working experience in teaching about elections.

The partnership has also led to a new partnership between Minneapolis Elections and the YMCA of the North to collaborate on a workshop designed to help youth develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate in civic life on a local level.

Understanding the Benefits of Young People Serving as Poll Workers | Tufts University | June 7, 2021 | <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/understanding-benefits-young-people-serving-poll-workers>



About Understanding Youth Civic Engagement Our Research 2020 Election Center CIRCLE in Action Explore Our Data From the Archives

Understanding the Benefits of Young People Serving as Poll Workers

June 7, 2021

Through a partnership in Minneapolis, we studied how youth gain skills, contribute to their communities, and increase youth turnout by working at the polls.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, CIRCLE has partnered with the Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services office, the YMCA of the North's Center for Youth Voice, Auburn University, and a group of young leaders (i.e. paid

Insights for Election Administrators from High School Poll Workers | By Asmaa Ismael | https://circle.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/2021-06/MN_electionadmins_PDF_5.26.pdf



Minneapolis Election Judge Project

Insights for Election Administrators from High School Poll Workers

What Youth Want You to Know

Student video using evidence-based advice on how to work more effectively with youth poll workers



<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rxDQDYXWIRtwEV15lkHuCTJQ0qAYqZp>

https://www.ymcanorth.org/kid_teen_activities/center_youth_voice/resources/student_election_judge_toolkit

Animated student video on voting by mail



**VOTE
HERE**
←



<https://bit.ly/2UBUaLi>