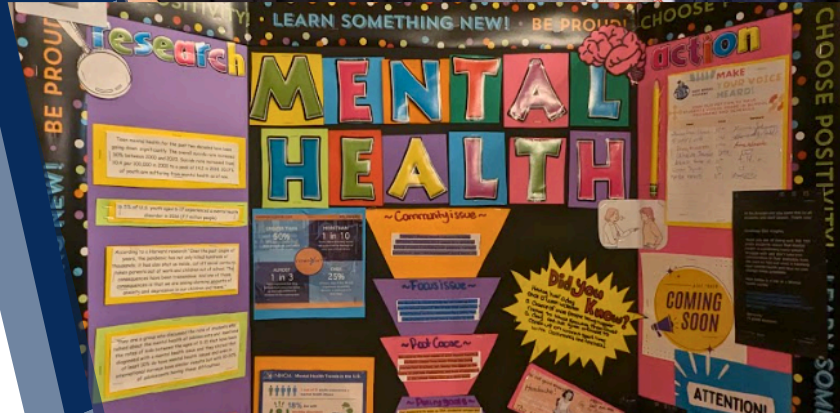
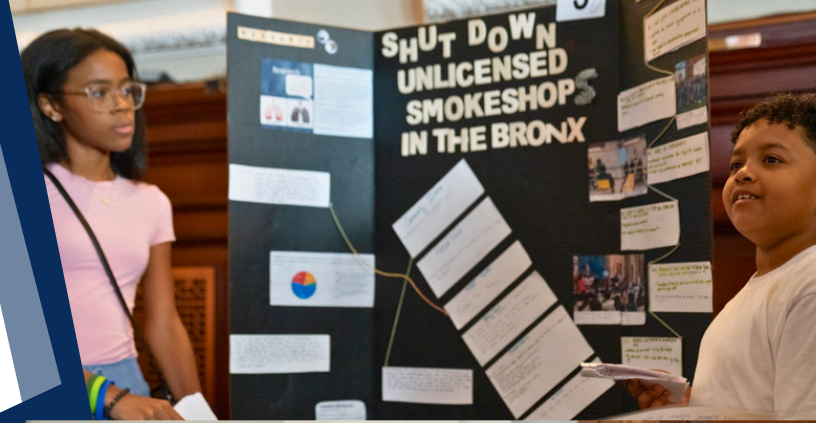


2024 ANNUAL REPORT

# MID-ATLANTIC

*New York and Pennsylvania*

The Future in Focus:  
Youth Leading Change



# Letter from Our Executive Director

Why civics? Americans want civics. There is bipartisan support as a rallying cry for civics education. When I observed young people from the High School for Health Professions and Human Services in spring testify at a New York City Council Hearing, it was a testament to their commitment to civic knowledge, civic skills and civic motivation. I saw pure democracy with aligned values and needs at the forefront. What began as an idea from a college student who was interested in advancing civics education based on his own experience, became Generation Citizen, a game changing movement for students, educators and community members.

*"Advocating is something I'm trying to work towards, I find it fun seeing how my voice is getting heard,"* reflected a 10th grader from High School for Health Professions and Human Services in Manhattan.

Students are immersed in civic engagement as a lived experience - and doing the work. From the unsafe issue of subway surfing in New York City to addressing school lunch challenges, testifying before the city council multiple times, advocating to address local civic issues in the community to elected officials, and ultimately creating legislation that was unanimously approved, the power of youth voice is leading the charge.

This is community-based civics.

Our teachers and administrators across New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania have also openly expressed that students should have prior knowledge and an understanding about how policies work to better understand what is happening and inform their future. Matthew Hanley, Patchogue-Medford's District Director of Secondary Humanities, explains that what matters most about GC is that students leave feeling empowered and heard by their local communities, and that they leave high school with the skills to play a civic role in their communities in the future. True civics education with a rich, meaningful learning experience is what we aim for.

My own civic journey began in Laurel, MD in a suburb just a few short miles outside of Washington, DC, the policy arena of the United States. I was introduced at a very early age to what it means and looks like to be an active participant in civic responsibility. Some of my earliest memories involve watching my father, an attorney, advocate for folks in the local community, and my mother, whose career was spent working as an educator and in local government. I vividly recall leaving church on Sunday being encouraged as a young person to be the changemaker and do something. At home, our conversations around the dinner table often centered around local issues, and weekends frequently included town meetings. My parents lived civic responsibility as active participants in the local community. What an honor and privilege.

We are at a turning point. We have a unique opportunity to ignite a spark that illuminates what can be. There is an opportunity for transformational change that starts with our collective, civic responsibility.

In the pages that follow, you'll discover the stories, statistics, and strategies that defined our work this past year. Each represents another step toward our vision: a country where every young person is equipped to shape the future of their community including all young people who deserve to inherit a democracy that works for everyone.

With gratitude,  
Courtne Thomas



**COURTNE THOMAS**

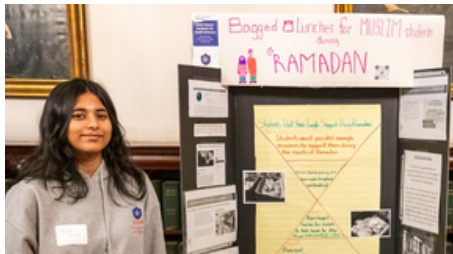
*Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic*

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# What We Do

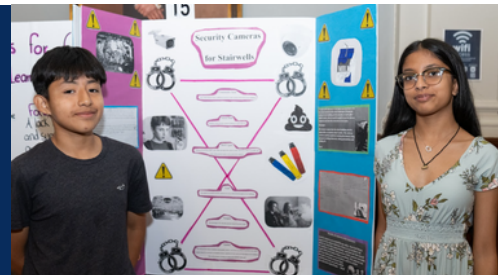


## COMMUNITY-BASED CIVICS

Educators across the country teach GC's project-based, interactive civics curriculum with support from our national and regional program teams. As civics learning comes to life, students become active citizens in their own communities.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT

The next chapter of our history will be written by today's students. We provide young people with the tools they need to lead through alumni engagement, fellowship programs, and leadership training.



## POLICY, ADVOCACY, & FIELD-BUILDING

Supportive civic education policies and a strong field of experts are more important than ever. Together with our partners, we advocate for funding and support to preserve and strengthen access to civic education. We provide young people with the tools they need to lead through alumni engagement, fellowship programs, and leadership training.

"Justice Stephen Breyer himself of the Supreme Court said that schools need to be incubators or nurseries for democracy, and that's what I strive for. I want things to be real and I want things to be experiential."

– David Edelman

Instructional Coach and Social Studies Teacher for the NYC Department of Education



## OUR 2023-24 MID-ATLANTIC IMPACT

**8,375** middle & high school students engaged

**145** teachers delivered GC's curriculum & received training, professional development, and support

at **61 SCHOOLS** across **NEW YORK AND PENNSYLVANIA**

## OUR 2023-24 NATIONAL REACH & IMPACT

**33,570** middle & high school students engaged

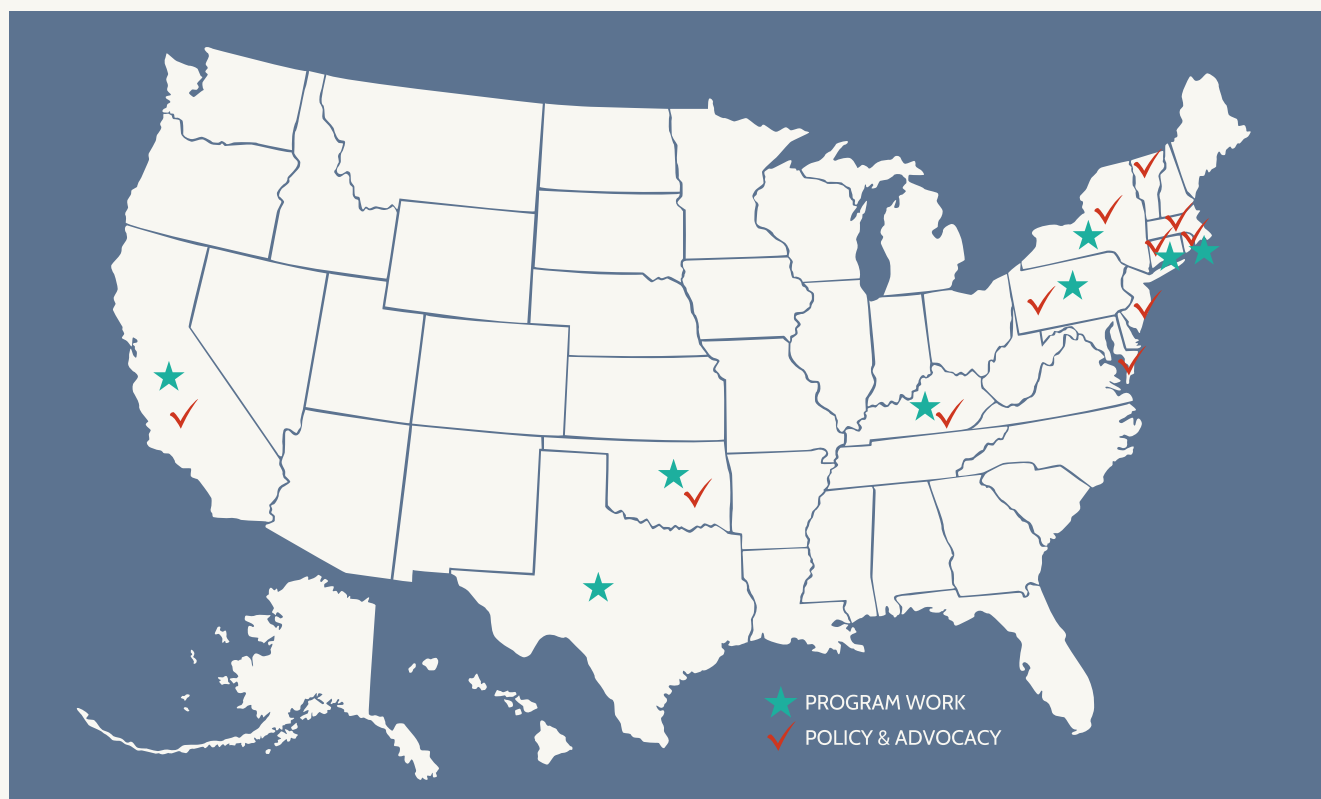
**544** teachers delivered GC's curriculum & received training, professional development, and support

**90%** of students in GC's classes were students of color

**99%** of teachers agree that the GC curriculum supported their ability to develop a democratic classroom culture

**98%** of GC students showed adoption of civic skills

**1,344** STUDENT CIVICS PROJECTS COMPLETED!

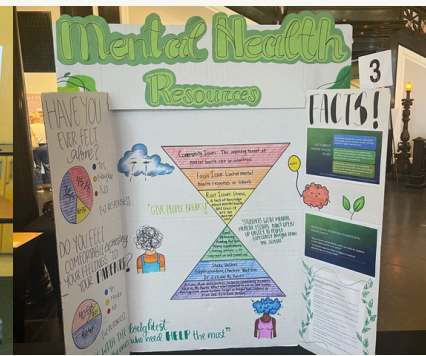


# GENERATION CITIZEN MID-ATLANTIC CIVICS DAYS

## PHILADELPHIA CIVICS DAY

In April, students from **four high schools across Philadelphia** gathered at the **National Constitution Center** to present their community-based civics projects developed over the course of the semester. The issues they addressed reflected both the challenges they face and the changes they hope to see in their communities. Each group brought thoughtful research and powerful personal insight, offering grounded solutions like **mental health education in schools, stronger protections for renters, and better support for students experiencing housing instability.**

**Student Changemaker Aya B.**, from Academy at Palumbo, spoke powerfully about the **visible impact of gentrification in her neighborhood** and her desire to advocate for policies that protect long-term residents. Award-winning student projects included **mental health access, youth drug education, hunger, vaping prevention, and renters' rights.**



“With our values grounded in collaboration, inclusion, responsibility, and action, we are inspired to do great things as we bring hope and promise to our posterity that our future will always be bright.”

– Neajah J.  
Student Changemaker at  
Buffalo Civics Days

## BUFFALO CIVICS DAY

In May, Generation Citizen hosted its **first-ever Buffalo Civics Day** at the **Buffalo History Museum**, a significant milestone in expanding community-based civics in Western New York. **34 students from six Buffalo public schools** presented their civic projects to peers and local leaders. Project topics ranged from **racial equity in education and public transit accessibility to mental health support for students.** Several teams addressed the challenges of food access, calling for school food sales that support student needs and nutrition. Others proposed community-wide solutions for improving youth safety and belonging.

Keynote speaker, **The Honorable Phillip Dabney, Jr., Buffalo City Court Judge**, reminded students that their civic engagement is not just encouraged—it's essential to shaping a more just future.



## NEW YORK CIVICS DAY

In June, Generation Citizen hosted NY Spring Civics Day at the **New York City Bar Association**, welcoming **over 120 students from 22 schools across New York City, Long Island, and Westchester**. Students took the floor to present solutions on topics that directly affect their neighborhoods—including **smoke shop overexposure in the Bronx**, **long bus wait times in underserved communities**, and **mental health care for individuals experiencing homelessness**.

**Council Member for New York City’s District 35 Crystal Hudson** joined us as keynote speaker, opening the event with a call to action: *“All levels of government must create more opportunity for all people, especially those who have been systemically pushed into the margins of society.”*

GC recognized outstanding educators like **Teacher Changemaker Valerie Littleton-Cohen** from University Heights High School, who has guided generations of students in connecting the classroom to civic life. **Student Changemakers Mia G., Daniel-Lee C., and Raida C.** also shared personal reflections on what civic participation has meant in their lives, underscoring that **age is no barrier to leadership when students are given the tools and trust to lead**.

This Civics Day also served as the setting for a **short-form documentary project** <sup>↗</sup> co-produced with **Einhorn Collaborative** and **Not A Billionaire**, offering a behind-the-scenes look at community-based civics in action. The film highlights GC’s impact across New York and features interviews with students, teachers, and staff.



“

“[Students] are recognizing that democracy is not about ‘me,’ it’s not about ‘I,’ it’s about ‘us.’ And that enables them to build bridges with folks with different identity backgrounds, different lived experiences...who may even have different priorities.”

– Elizabeth Clay Roy  
GC’s Chief Executive Officer

”



Did you know? After completing a project, 92% of GC students report having developed the skills necessary to participate in public life, and—perhaps more importantly—81% report that they believe they can make a difference in the public square.



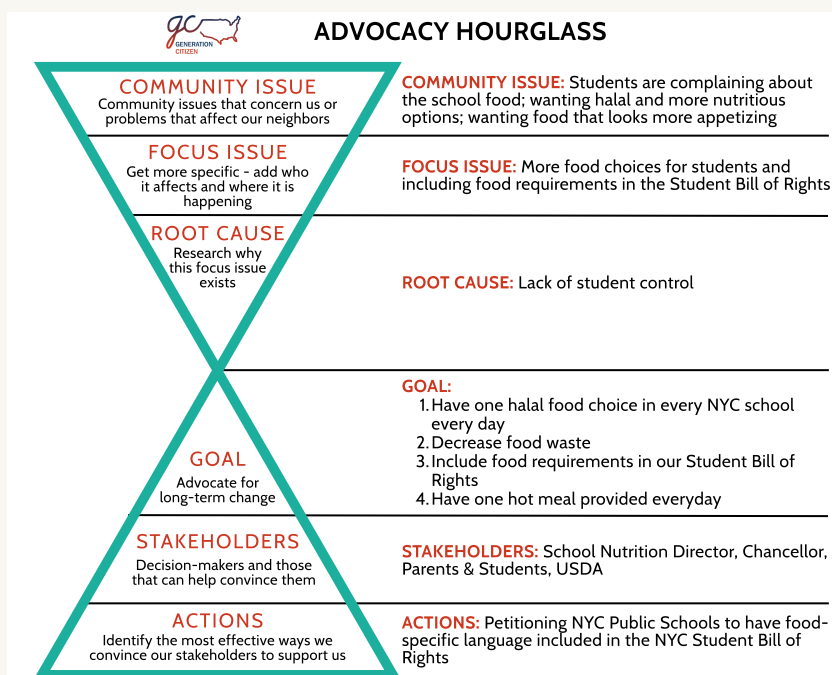
# STUDENTS ADVOCATE FOR FOOD ACCESS AND CAPTURE ATTENTION OF PBS

In November 2024, Generation Citizen (GC) was prominently featured in PBS's groundbreaking documentary, *A Citizen's Guide to Democracy* <sup>↗</sup>—a powerful exploration of civic engagement in action. This national spotlight underscored the transformative impact of community-based civics, showcasing how GC empowers young people to lead change in their communities.

The episode followed a GC classroom at Union Square Academy in New York City as students prepared for and presented at Civics Day. Led by educator David Edelman, the class tackled a project with deeply personal relevance: **advocating for halal and nutritious school lunches in NYC public schools**. As students researched policy, conducted interviews, and prepared their recommendations, PBS cameras captured the full arc of what community-based civics makes possible—students connecting their identities to civic issues and building power through knowledge and collaboration.

At the center of the project was **9th grader Sumaiya A.**, who spoke passionately at Civics Day about the gaps she and her classmates experienced in school food access. Sumaiya was recognized with GC's Fall 2023 **High School Student Changemaker Award**, an honor that underscored her leadership and long-standing commitment to civic engagement. Her voice, alongside her peers', brought urgency and clarity to a policy conversation that too often excludes student perspectives.

PBS also filmed the students meeting with **Alexis Gillen, Supervisor in District 2, Office of Food and Nutrition Services**, to understand what it would take to make school kitchens halal-ready. The conversation touched on everything from operational logistics to the impact of citywide budget cuts—proof that **GC classrooms aren't simulations; they're launchpads for real civic inquiry and advocacy**.



Generation Citizen's Advocacy Hourglass — the core of the GC Project-Based Civics Curriculum; above photo includes notes from Sumaiya's class project







What began as a civic classroom project at the **Urban Assembly Institute of Math & Science for Young Women (UAI)** in NYC has become one of the most sustained, student-led public safety efforts Generation Citizen has ever sparked. [↗](#)

In 2022–2023, UAI students voiced concerns about safety and police-student relations in their downtown Brooklyn neighborhood. With support from educator **Kelly Preston** and GC’s community-based civics curriculum, students began advocating for change—seeking not just to be heard but to co-create safer, more trusting environments.

Their organizing paid off. In 2024, UAI students secured a **\$25,000 grant from NYC Council Member Lincoln Restler** to fund after-school safe passage support. The New York City Department of Education matched the grant for the broader Adams Street Campus, doubling their resources to \$50,000. Through the partnership, students brought on community-based organization **Elite Learners, Inc.** to implement the initiative.

As the work grew, students formalized their leadership into a **Youth Leadership Council (YLC)**, which meets weekly and has developed a clear mission: **to give peers a voice, question the status quo, and engage government partners in building a safer, more connected community.**

In May and October 2024, the YLC hosted “**Bridging the Gap**,” a youth-led event series held at McLaughlin Park. Each gathering brought together over 150 students and local police officers to share food, music, games, and dialogue. The culminating moment—a tug of war between officers and students—captured the day’s spirit: **relationships built on trust, not tension.**

This work stands as a powerful example of what’s possible when civic learning is sustained and youth voice is taken seriously.







## ACTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION: Generation Citizen Leads Youth Civic Summit at Lincoln Center

In July 2024, Generation Citizen partnered with **Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts**, **DoSomething**, and **PBS Frontline** to co-host *Show Up for What?*, a youth civic engagement gathering centered on reflection, dialogue, and action. The event brought together over 100 students from New York and Pennsylvania to explore the issues shaping their communities and their role in shaping democracy.

GC led a session on lowering the voting age and community leadership. GC's **Mid-Atlantic Youth Policy Fellows Ary and Amyiah** co-facilitated the conversation, helping peers identify local issues, map community assets, and consider how young people can lead meaningful change. Participants also explored GC's **RISE Vote** voter education and registration campaign.

In another workshop, GC partnered with PBS Frontline's Erika Howard to lead a session on **investigative journalism, youth-led media, and activism** and students created a collaborative mural envisioning change in their own communities.

Students Stella and Denisia from GC's partner school, Academy at Palumbo in Philadelphia, shared their **GC project on housing insecurity and renters' rights**, sparking cross-city dialogue and collaboration.

*Show Up for What?* demonstrated the impact of intergenerational civic partnership and the importance of creating spaces where young people can lead. It reflected Generation Citizen's belief that when students are supported to engage, **they don't just participate in democracy — they help strengthen it.**





## A Historic Step Forward: Newark Passes Groundbreaking Vote16 Ordinance

When Newark, NJ students **Yenjay and Anjali** began asking why their voices weren't represented in school board decisions, they didn't wait for permission to speak up—they started organizing. Their work, rooted in the belief that students deserve a say in shaping their education, sparked a citywide movement that made history.

In January 2024, the Newark City Council unanimously passed an ordinance to lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections, making Newark the **largest municipality in the country** to extend voting rights to young people. The victory marks the **most significant expansion of youth voting rights in the United States since the passage of the 26th Amendment in 1971**. This movement was led by Vote16NJ and supported by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, Generation Citizen, and a coalition of youth organizers and advocates who believed the moment for change had arrived.

What began with student frustration quickly transformed into a high-profile campaign. Young people shared testimonies, spoke at public hearings, built coalitions, and captured the attention of policymakers across the state. Their efforts culminated in a statewide endorsement from **New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy** in his 2024 State of the State Address, signaling widespread support for the measure.

As Newark prepared for its first school board election with 16- and 17-year-old voters in April 2025, partners across the city were working to ensure those new voters were informed, registered, and ready to make their voices heard.

*"This would be by far the most consequential effort to lower the voting age to 16 in the country."*

”

– Andrew Wilkes  
GC's Chief Policy & Advocacy Officer

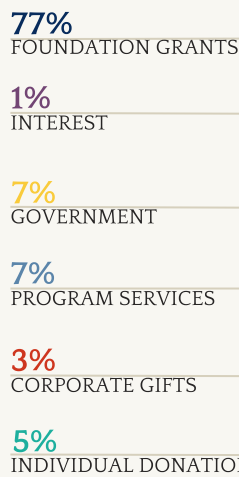
# OUR FINANCIALS

In the 2024 Fiscal Year, Generation Citizen raised \$7,424,838.30 and spent \$5,153,515.50.

Generation Citizen was able to invest in critical new capacity this fiscal year thanks to generous multi-year gifts from donors, including significant gifts from New Profit and Yield Giving.

Due to these and other generous investments, we brought on additional staff focused on partnership development and program delivery as we grew the number of schools, teachers and students we worked with, and laid the foundation for future growth into new states.

## REVENUES



## EXPENSES



Many thanks to the generous supporters who made significant gifts during  
Generation Citizen's 2024 Fiscal Year.

*Your partnership and commitment are deeply appreciated. Together, we are empowering a  
movement of young people prepared to lead and transform our democracy.*

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*"Being involved in this class and participating in discussions, debates, and projects has deepened my understanding of how our voices and actions can influence policies, create movements, and ensure that the issues that matter to us are heard."*

— GC Student, South Region

*"Your voice, your mind, the things that matter to you is what makes education what it is...you have to really think about what are the things that matter to you and your community."*

— Dr. Nyshawana Francis-Thompson  
Chief of Curriculum & Instruction for The School District of Philadelphia



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*"This civics work—this is who I am."*

— GC Student, West Region

*"Our youth feel empowered when they can potentially make a change and especially to have adults listen to them, and hear them, and have conversations with them about what they think is important, it really does empower them."*

— Tristan Williams  
Department Head, Social Studies at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School