

Engaging Young People in your Community

Tips for Politicians and Public Servants

So you want to talk to youth!

First, be mindful that not all people under 30 think of themselves as youth. They want to talk to you, and treating them like the adults they are will open a great conversation. In fact, based on results of two program evaluations, coordinating a politician or public servant to speak to their class was one of the primary sources of participants' learning, growth, and ultimate increase in commitment to democracy.

100%

of participants in our Semester in Democracy said hosting a visiting speaker had the greatest impact

94%

surveyed said Q&A breakouts with speakers helped them engage with the program themes for City Shapers

Engaging young people in a meaningful way takes more than a social media campaign or viral video. What young people have told us, is they want to have conversations and get to know you better.

Here are a few tips they want to give you:

1

Be casual:

Sure, it's helpful to prepare talking points, but young people can tell when you're talking from a script. It's more engaging when you ditch the key messages and just have a conversation.

2

Be candid:

Young people want to hear the truth about your experiences, not just your successes. Share the triumphs, but also share the challenges you've had to face and compromises you've had to make to get where you are now.

3

Be reciprocal:

Have a dialogue, not a monologue. It's helpful for young people to hear what you have to say, but also listen and take action on their perspective too.

Based on pre survey, post survey, and interviews.

BONUS TIP

Follow the leader:

Participants said that one of the highlights of talking to politicians and public servants was that they were given the opportunity to lead the conversation. They valued this aspect because it helped them build new skills and feel closer to the democratic process. By following the lead of a young person and letting them organize and lead your conversation, you will nurture their sense of leadership and ultimately have a more engaged conversation.

"Hosting a politician was a highlight of my experience because you never have that opportunity in a class to take that much responsibility for something."

"It's important to see what's actually going through the head of a politician who's in the position of local government."

"I was ready to be defensive, kind of like argue with [the politician], but I didn't need to at the end because he was just so open and welcoming to different ideas."

"I appreciated that they were talking more from their personal perspectives on the issues rather than as a member of government or as a professional in whatever capacity they were in."

