



Mixed-Methods Evaluation of the

OUR VOICES SUMMIT

Summer 2025

Hosted by the Institute
for Citizens & Scholars

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**School Board and
Youth Engagement Lab**
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The School Board and Youth Engagement (S-BYE) Lab at Teachers College develops research-based ideas and new technology tools for strengthening youth engagement and redesigning school boards to be more democratic.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Our Voices Summit, hosted by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, brought together youth and adult allies for three days of dialogue, learning, and collaboration. Designed to foster meaningful intergenerational exchange, the Summit featured interactive workshops, deliberations, and team-building activities aimed at strengthening civic efficacy, deepening understanding across generations, and building sustainable networks. Dr. Jonathan Collins and his research team at Teachers College, Columbia University conducted an external mixed-methods evaluation, collecting survey and open-ended responses at multiple points during the Summit. The findings demonstrate that participants were highly engaged, reported meaningful learning about relationships, community, and facilitation skills, and left with stronger confidence in their ability to affect change. The evaluation also highlights areas for refinement to ensure the Summit continues to maximize impact in future iterations.

BACKGROUND

The Our Voices Intergenerational Youth Summit (August 14–16, 2025, Philadelphia) was convened by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars as part of its national commitment to strengthening civic learning and leadership. The Summit brought together young people aged 14–24 and adult allies - including educators, community advocates, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropic partners - for three days of structured dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

The event was designed to foster deliberative dialogue across differences, activate community discussion and action, and reduce affective polarization. Participants engaged in a sequence of panels, workshops, and deliberations, supported by Citizens & Scholars Fellows and partners such as Cortico. Programming included community-building exercises, a “sensemaking” workshop, thematic deliberations on issues such as civil liberties, environment, and economic opportunity, and action-planning sessions to help participants bring skills back to their communities.

The Summit emphasized intergenerational collaboration as a core strategy. Youth and adults participated side by side in workshops, reflective table talks, and small-group deliberations, with intentional opportunities to practice inclusive dialogue and build consensus. Participants were expected not only to contribute during the Summit itself but also to extend the work into their own communities by facilitating post-Summit conversations and documenting what they learned.

By the end of the Summit, participants left with:

- Skills to lead difficult conversations,
- Action plans for creating impact in their own communities,
- Greater confidence in sustaining hard conversations, and
- A new network of youth and adult allies to support ongoing civic engagement.

METHODOLOGY

An external mixed methods event evaluation was conducted for the August 14th - 16th, 2025 **Our Voices Summit**. Data was collected at four time points: 1) After registration, prior to the start of the Summit activities (pre-survey, $n = 38$); 2) at the end of the first day (Day 1 end-of-day survey, $n = 38$); 3) at the end of the second day (Day 2 end-of-day survey, $n = 35$); and after the conclusion of the Summit activities (post-survey, $n = 14$).

Description statistics were used to examine participants’ experiences at the Summit and how responses to key constructs shifted after participation in the Summit. Responses to the open-ended questions provided deeper insight into our constructs of interest, highlighted key elements of the Summit design, and captured the impact of the Summit experience through participants’ own voices.

This report is organized by the following components:

Participant Profiles:

- 4 Demographic questions (pre-survey only)

Summit Experience:

- On both end-of-day surveys, participants were asked to rate their interest and participation in each of the day's activities. Day 1 consisted of two activities and Day 2 consisted of 7 activities
- On both end-of-day surveys, participants were asked open-ended questions about what they learned during that day's activities
- On both end-of-day surveys and the post-survey, participants were asked about what they would improve about the Summit
- On the post-survey, participants were asked 4 multiple-choice questions about their deliberative experience at the summit
- On the post-survey, participants were asked 3 questions about their new Summit network

Summit Impact:

All questions were asked on both the pre- and post-surveys

- 4 questions about *Civic Efficacy*
- 3 questions about *Deliberative Quality and Inclusion*
- 4 questions about *Intergenerational Collaboration*
- 3 questions about *Mechanisms*
- 3 quantitative questions; responses were on a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree"). (Pre- and post-surveys)
- 3 open-ended questions about participants' experiences during conversations at the Summit

Participant Profiles:

Participants were asked four demographic questions on the pre-survey: 1) Their race/ethnicity; 2) their gender; 3) the year they were born and 4) where they live. Responses are shown in the figures below.

Participants' Race/Ethnicity

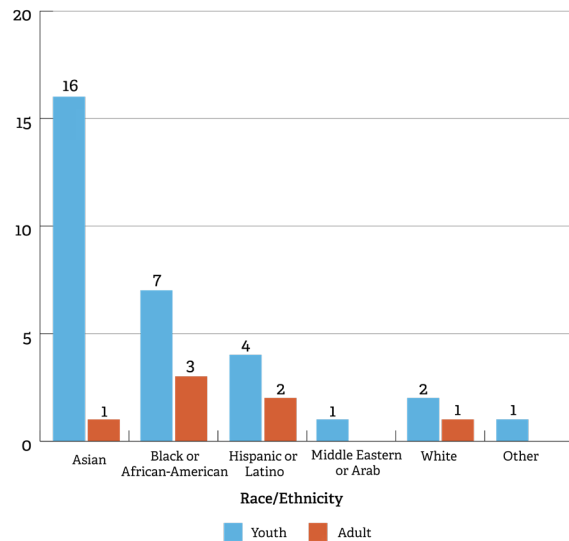


Figure 1. Participants' race/ethnicity by count. $N = 38$ (youth = 31, adults = 7).

Participants' Gender

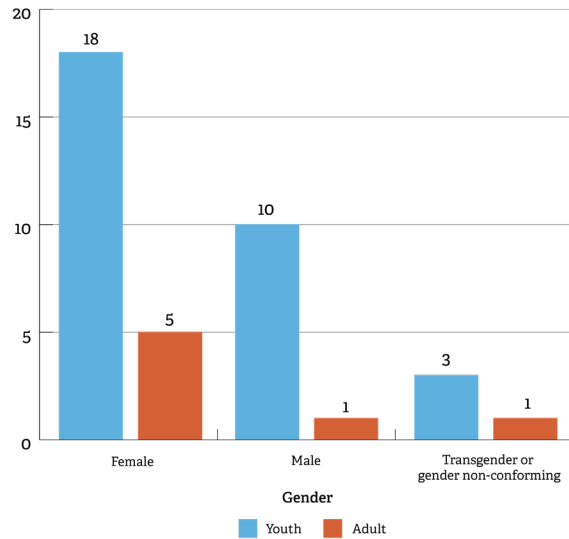


Figure 2. Participants' gender. $N = 38$ (youth = 31, adults = 7).

Participants' Age

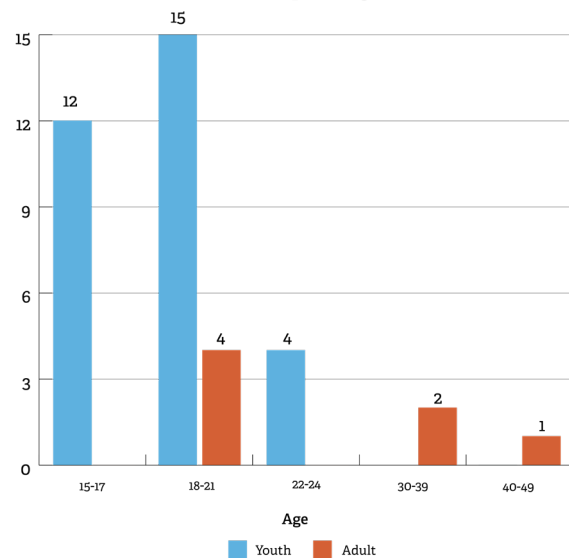


Figure 3. Participants' age. Attendees' classification (as youth or adults) was based on how they registered for the event, rather than age differentiation. $N = 38$ (youth = 31, adults = 7).

Participants' Place of Residence

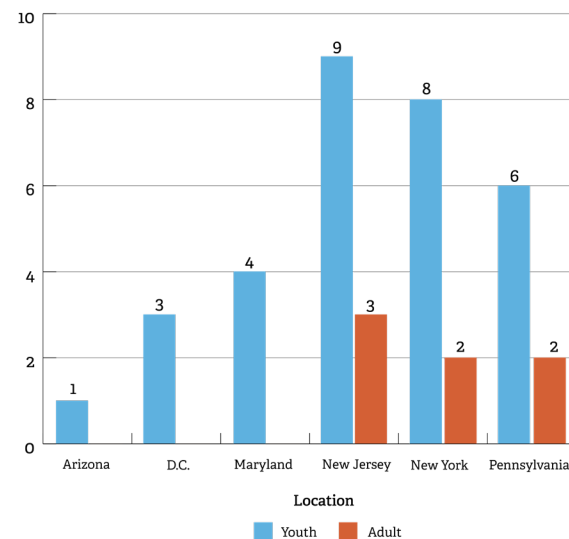


Figure 4. Participants' place of residence. $N = 38$ (youth = 31, adults = 7).

Summit Experience

Participants were asked to provide feedback on their Summit experience at different time points. The data below comes from the two end-of-day surveys and the post-survey.

Activity Feedback

On the end-of-day surveys, participants were asked to rate their level of interest and participation in each of the day's activities. Interest for each activity was rated using a 4-point likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not interested") to 4 ("Very interested"). Participation in each activity was rated using a 4-point likert scale ranging from 1 ("I didn't participate") to 4 ("I participated a lot").

Day 1 Activities

Over 90% of participants reported being interested or very interested in both of the Day 1 activities ($n = 31$ for both activities but there was one missing response for **Co-Generate (Part 1)** (see Figure 5). Slightly more participants reported participating either a decent amount or a lot in the **Co-Generate (Part 2)** activity compared to **Co-Generate (Part 1)** activity ($n = 25$ and 23 respectively). On average, participants reported being more interested in **Co-Generate (Part 1)** than **Co-Generate (Part 2)** but participating more in **Co-Generate (Part 2)** than **Co-Generate (Part 1)**.¹

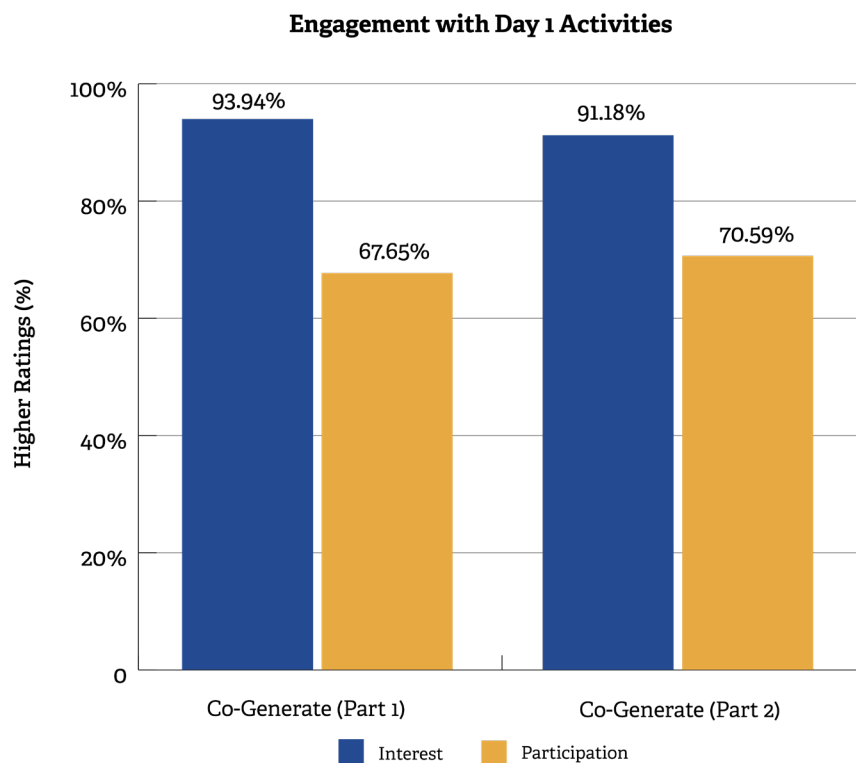


Figure 5. The percentage of participants who reported being interested or very interested in each activity and the percentage who reported participating either a decent amount or a lot in Day 1 activities.

1. **Co-Generate (Part 1):** Average level of interest: 3.39; average level of participation: 2.97. **Co-Generate (Part 2):** Average level of interest: 3.29; average level of participation: 3.06.

Day 2 Activities

Over three-quarters of participants reported being interested or very interested in all of the Day 2 activities (see Figure 6). With the exception of the **Speaker Spotlight: My Civic Journey** activity², more than half the participants reported participating either a decent amount or a lot in all of the Day 2 activities.

On average, participants had the highest levels of interest in the **Speaker Spotlight: My Civic Journey** and **Deliberation by Issue Area** activities.³ The **Evening Team Building** and **Deliberation by Issue Area** activities⁴ had the highest average levels of participation.

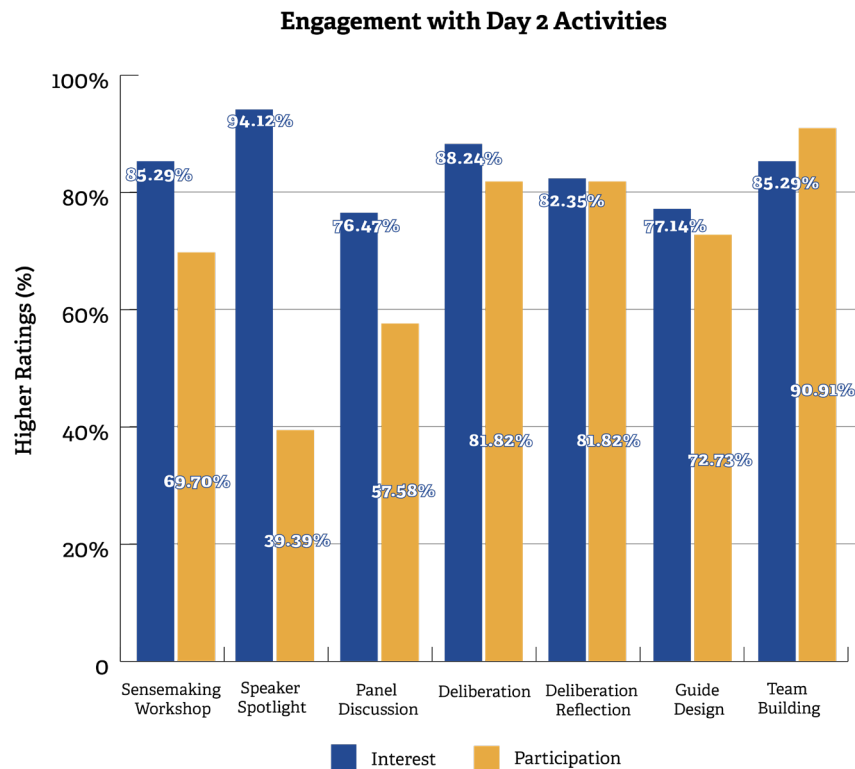


Figure 6. The percentage of participants who reported being interested or very interested in each activity and the percentage who reported participating either a decent amount or a lot in Day 2 activities. *Note.* Sensemaking Workshop = Sensemaking Workshop with Cortico; Speaker Spotlight = Speaker Spotlight: My Civic Journey; Panel Discussion = Panel Discussion: Using Stories to Make Change; Deliberation = Deliberation by Issue Area; Deliberation Reflection = Deliberation Reflection with Close Up: Surfacing Values and Seeking Consensus; Guide Design = Conversation Guide Design: Creating Prompts for Understanding; Team Building = Evening Team Building.

2. The design of the **Speaker Spotlight** activity may explain the lower levels of participation.

3. **Speaker Spotlight: My Civic Journey:** Average level of interest: 3.65. **Deliberation by Issue Area:** Average level of interest: 3.56.

4. **Evening Team Building:** average level of participation: 3.42. **Deliberation by Issue Area:** average level of participation: 3.24.

Lessons from the Summit

On both the Day 1 and Day 2 end-of-day surveys, participants were asked to describe, in 1-2 sentences, what they had learned during that day's sessions. Responses fell into three broad categories: 1) Lessons about relationships and community; 2) the importance of co-generational relationships and 3) new knowledge and skills.

Lessons about Relationships and Community

Participants reported learning about the importance of having conversations and collaborations with people from diverse backgrounds, finding connection through shared experiences and learning from others' lived experiences to form connections and community.

"I learned about the similarity in people's lives and how we all care about the same issues no matter our age."
- Adult attendee (Day 1)

"[I learned about] the power of community and the impact of individual experiences on the makeup of the overall society in which we live in."
- Youth attendee (Day 1)

The Importance of Co-Generational Relationships

Numerous participants described learning about the importance of co-generational relationships. Participants reported learning about both the similarities across generations and the unique challenges that members of different generations faced.

"Age diverse groups is possibly our greatest catalyst for growth."
- Youth attendee (Day 1)

"Today, I learned how many similarities there really is within different age gaps/generations. We all come from different communities yet have experienced similar experiences that have affected us heavily as well."
- Youth attendee (Day 1)

New Knowledge and Skills

Participants reported gaining new knowledge about different concepts, organizations, and the power of stories and narratives in shaping action and civic dialogue. They also described learning facilitation skills and dialogue techniques to facilitate productive conversations.

"I learned more about non-profit work." - Youth attendee (Day 1)

"I gained some very valuable insight about narrative design, the power and importance of perspective, taking and collaborative methods of communication building." - Adult attendee (Day 2)

Areas for Improvement

In addition to being asked about what they had learned, the Day 1 and Day 2 end-of-day surveys asked participants to describe, in 1-2 sentences, if there was anything they had found unclear about that day's lessons or anything they wanted to explore more. Additionally, on the post-survey, participants were asked: "In 1-2 sentences tell us what, if this Summit runs again, would improve youth and adult discussions?"

75% of the participants on Day 1 and 65.71% of the participants on Day 2 expressed that they did not feel any confusion about the content of that day's activities. Several went on to add that they felt that "everything was well explained" (youth attendee, Day 1) and "empowering" (youth attendee, Day 2).

Comments on the end-of-the-day surveys and the post-surveys both mentioned some suggested changes to the Summit's schedule and structure. These included wishing they had more time to get to know their peers during the first day of activities, wanting more breaks between activities and enjoying being in unique breakout rooms more than in a single space. On the post-survey, participants also added that they wished there had been more of a range of ages present at the Summit (in particular people over the age of 60) and wishing that adult-youth pairs had the opportunity to practice the skills that they learned over the three days.

Participants also expressed on the end-of-the-day surveys that they wished that more time and depth had been spent on specific content areas. On Day 1, some of these topics participants highlighted wanting more information about civil liberties, creating change in one's community and types of intelligence. On Day 2, this list expanded to include information about defamation laws, freedom of speech and the way that the discussions at the Summit connected to certain systems, such as healthcare.

Deliberative Experience

On the post-survey, participants were asked to rate their agreement with four statements about the deliberative experience on a seven-point likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree"). Three-quarters of the participants reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with all four of the statements (see Figure 7, page 9).

Network Building

Participants were asked three questions about the networks they built at the Summit on the post-survey. First, the participants were asked: "How many new people did you meaningfully connect with?" Answers ranged from 0 to 6+. The 14 respondents all indicated that they made more than 6 meaningful connections. Next, participants were asked to elaborate on this response and describe the roles that best described their new connections. All of the participants, including the 3 adult attendees, described one of their new connections as a youth. Of the adult connections that participants made, 71.43% worked as educators, 64.29% at non-profits, 42.86% worked in philanthropy and 21.43% were government employees. Finally, participants were asked whether or not they intended to stay in contact with their new connections, to which they all replied that they did.

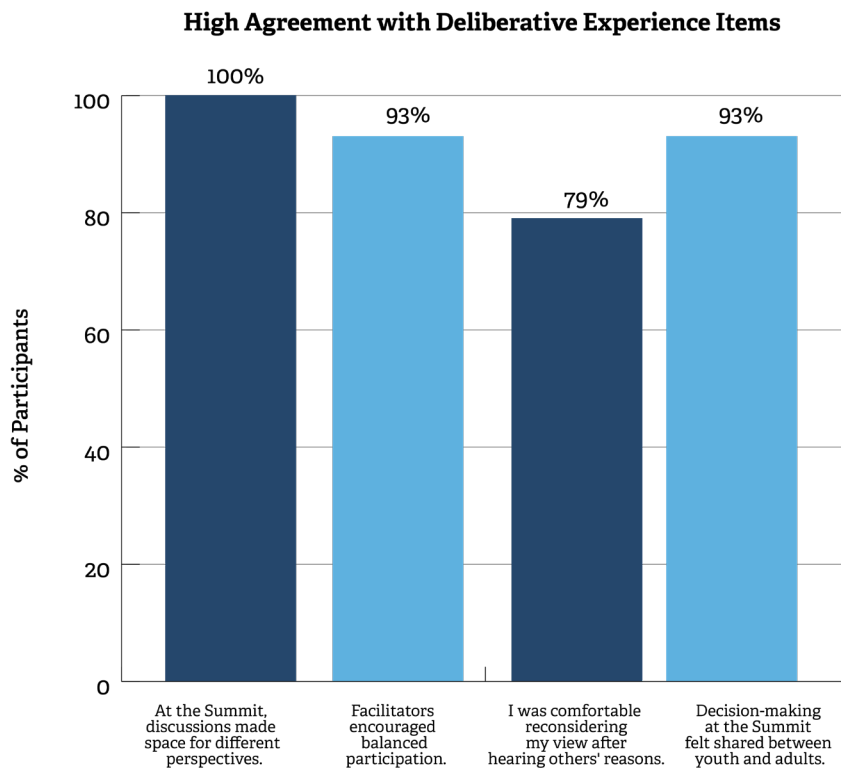


Figure 7. Percentage of participants who reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements about their deliberative experience.

Summit Impact

We were interested in examining differences between how participants responded to several constructs prior to, and after, participation in the Summit. On both the pre- and post-surveys, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following items on a seven-point likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”). In addition participants were asked three open-ended questions on the post-survey: 1) “Name one idea from a youth or an adult ally that changed how you think or what you’ll do.” 2) “Describe one moment you felt heard.” 3) Describe one moment you made space for youth voice (or wish you had). In addition to responses from the end-of-the-day surveys, responses to these items are used below to illustrate each construct.

Civic Efficacy and Commitment

Participants were asked four multiple choice questions about their belief in their ability to impact their communities and civic spaces. On average, participants expressed stronger agreement with each of the items after, compared to prior to, the Summit (see Figure 8). This finding demonstrates that the activities during the Summit potentially increased both participants’ belief in their own ability to influence local politics and their willingness to participate in civic engagement.

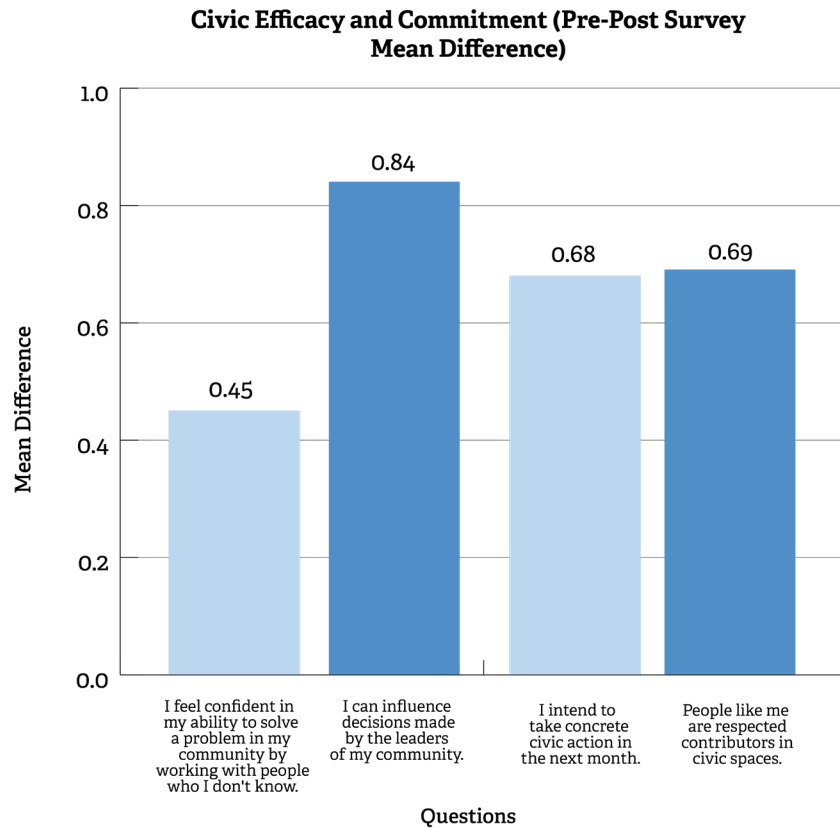


Figure 8. Mean difference on Civic Efficacy and Commitment items. Positive numbers indicate that, on average, participants scored higher on the post-survey compared to the pre-survey.

In addition to the quantitative response, there was some evidence of how participation in the Summit increased perceptions of civic efficacy in the qualitative responses.

"I learned that other people would support me as a leader."

- Youth attendee (Day 1)



"One idea that I took from an adult ally was to think about how I, myself, want my daily life to look like in my community."

- Youth attendee (Post-survey)

Deliberative Quality and Inclusion

Participants were asked three multiple choice questions about their deliberative quality and inclusion on both the pre- and post-survey. On average, participants expressed stronger agreement with two of the items after, compared to prior to, the Summit (see Figure 9, page 11).

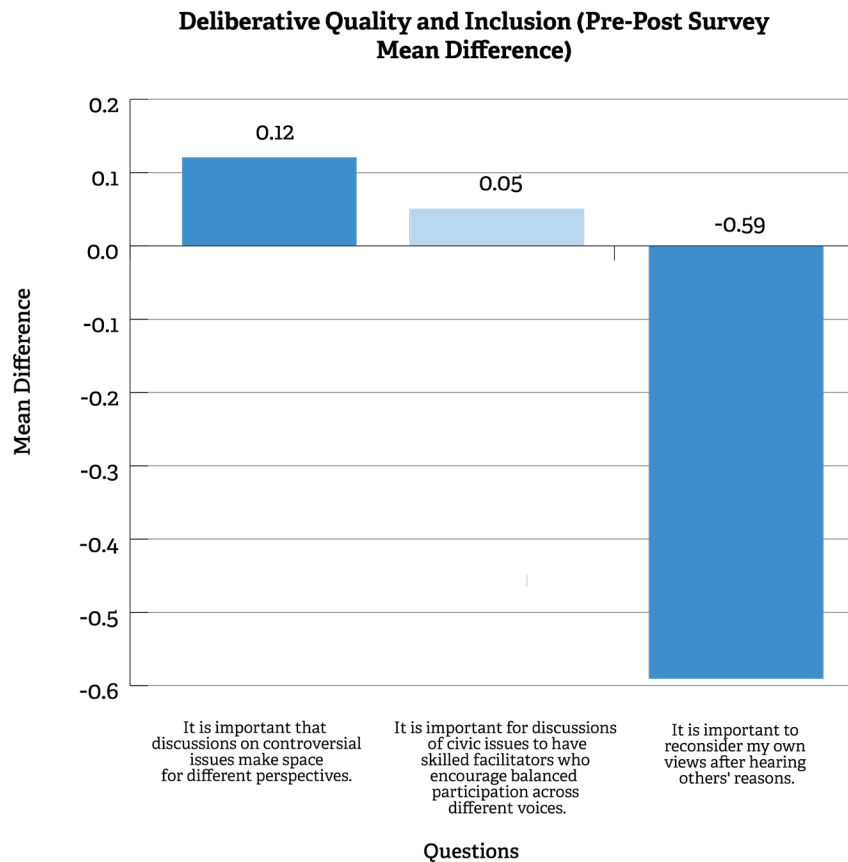


Figure 9. Mean difference on Deliberative Quality and Inclusion items. Positive numbers indicate that, on average, participants scored higher on the post-survey compared to the pre-survey.

However, participants were more likely to express stronger agreement with the statement “It is important to reconsider my own views after hearing others’ reasons” before the Summit than afterwards. One possible explanation for this phenomenon may lie in the wording of the item. Participants’ expressed that the Summit emphasized the importance of being respectful and empathetic of other peoples’ experiences and opinions even when they contrasted with one’s own perspective. For example, one youth wrote: *“I learned so much, such as active listening to others’ stories and not being afraid to challenge opinions”* (Day 2).

In their open-ended responses, participants reported learning about the importance of making space for multiple perspectives in conversations.

“Your truth can be different from my truth.”
- Youth attendee (Day 2)



“[I learned about] the power of intercultural connections and conversations.”
- Youth attendee (Post-survey)

Intergenerational Collaboration

Participants were asked four multiple choice questions about their perceptions on intergenerational collaboration on both the pre- and post-survey. On average, participants expressed stronger agreement with three of the four items after, compared to prior to, the Summit (see Figure 10).

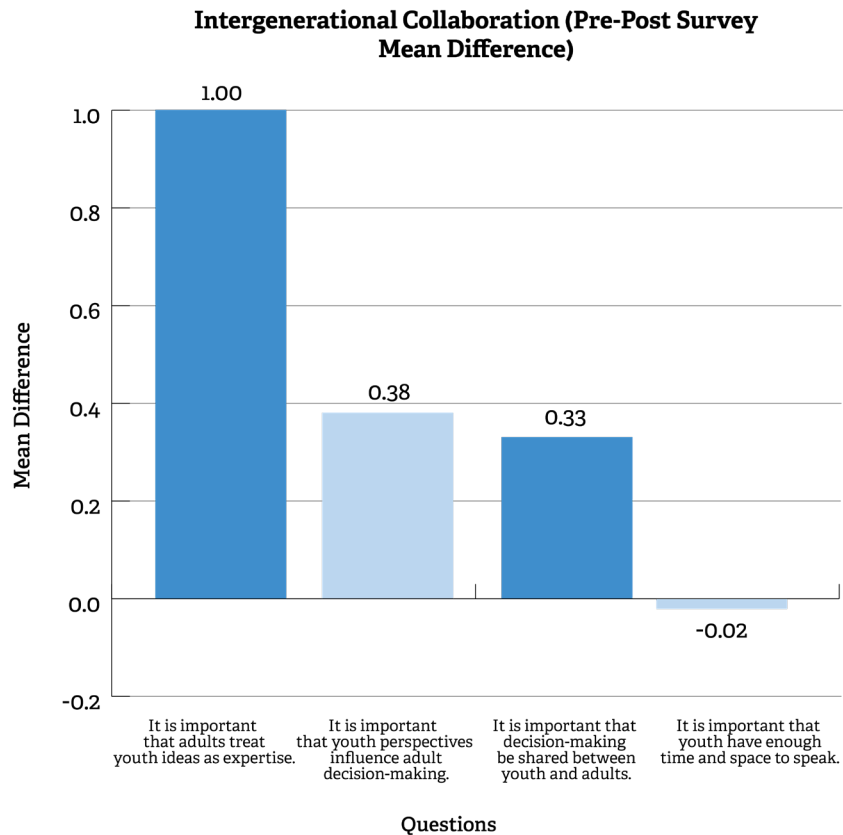


Figure 10. Mean difference on Intergenerational Collaboration items. Positive numbers indicate that, on average, participants scored higher on the post-survey compared to the pre-survey.

It was clear from the qualitative responses that the importance, and value, of intergenerational collaborations was one of the key take-aways for participants. As one youth participant simply put it: *“Working across generations is important”* (youth attendee). Multiple participants elaborated on this with comments about the importance they put on having voices from multiple generations in dialogue with one another.

“Co-generational relationships are crucial in promoting understanding.”
- Youth attendee (Day 1)



“It was clear there was so much wisdom in the room and we’d all learn from hearing from the young people present.”
- Adult attendee (Post-survey)

Mechanism of Change

Participants were asked three multiple choice questions about mechanisms of change stemming from their participation in the Summit intergenerational collaboration on both the pre- and post-survey. On average, participants expressed stronger agreement with all three items after, compared to prior to, the Summit (see Figure 11).

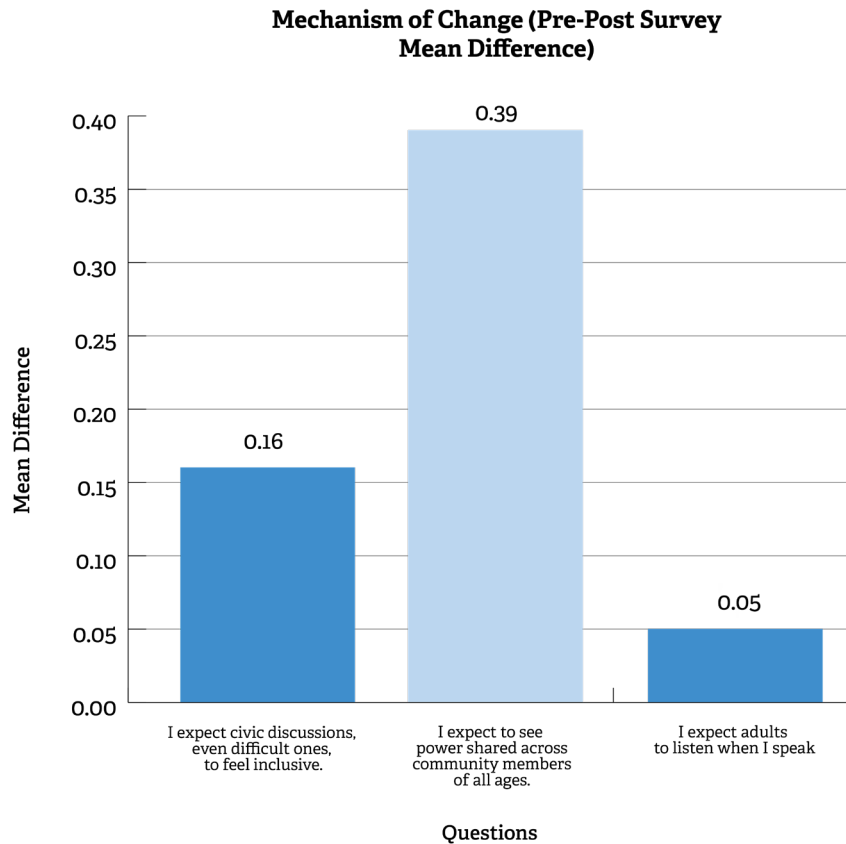


Figure 11. Mean difference on Mechanism of Change items. Positive numbers indicate that, on average, participants scored higher on the post-survey compared to the pre-survey.

In their open-ended responses, participants elaborated on ways that the Summit had taught them to facilitate inclusive and productive dialogues.

"I learned about the deep importance of facilitating intentional difficult conversations with prompts, with games, with open dialogue."
- Adult attendee (Day 2)



"One adult ally reminded me that listening is just as powerful as speaking."
- Youth attendee (Post-survey)

CONCLUSION

Overall, the evaluation suggests that the Our Voices Summit was a meaningful and impactful experience for both youth and adult participants. Attendees reported greater civic confidence, stronger appreciation for intergenerational collaboration, and valuable new networks. At the same time, participant feedback points to opportunities for strengthening the Summit's design, including providing more time for informal connection, integrating applied lessons for local action, and ensuring greater accessibility of content. By building on these recommendations, the Summit can deepen its role as a catalyst for intergenerational dialogue and civic engagement, equipping participants with both the inspiration and the practical tools needed to create change in their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on participant feedback from Days 1 and 2, several adjustments can be made to strengthen future sessions. One suggestion was to increase the amount of time for unstructured interaction and socializing during the day. Participants expressed that they wanted more opportunities to get to know their fellow attendees and also noted the need for additional breaks between activities to prevent fatigue.

Another area of improvement involves adding conversations about how to apply lessons more directly to participants' own communities. Several mentioned wanting more focus on how to create change locally and requested more practical facilitation training to support this application.

Participants also raised concerns about accessibility in discussions. Several noted having difficulty following some of the conversation, particularly when complex examples, terms, or concepts were used. To address this, participants recommended including notes or summaries, adding live captioning, breaking down dense content, and incorporating more time for reflection and practice. Finally, participants suggested avoiding the practice of having everyone in a single large room. Instead, they recommended using multiple spaces for smaller group discussions, which they felt would encourage richer and more engaging conversations.