IEI NEWSLETTER

How Does Your County Rank?

Rarely a week goes by without a call from a community seeking support as its leaders plan for the future. Amid all the advice IEI might offer, perhaps the most important is “engage your youth.”

While surprising to some, this advice reflects squarely IEI’s practice of shining a light on opportunities for positive economic differentiation.

At the recent Emerging Issues Forum, Innovation Reconstructed, IEI released our 2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index report to emphasize the relationship between high levels of civic engagement and innovation in our contemporary economy. North Carolina’s current levels of civic engagement are just average, so it should surprise no one that our innovation ranking among states is also middle of the pack. Boosting civic engagement represents a great opportunity to differentiate North Carolina from our competitors.

Given our overall numbers, there is much work to be done. Today, however, I want to focus on the importance of connecting with youth – teens and young adults. We addressed young adults, ages 18-30, as a key demographic segment in our Civic Health Index, and pointed out that this group was startlingly under-engaged as compared to those above 30 years of age. A recent report, “Connecting Youth and Strengthening Communities,” notes the powerful personal and societal benefits that result from enhanced engagement of youth ages 16-24. Produced by Opportunity Nation, a bipartisan, national coalition of more than 300 businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions, and community leaders, the report makes the case that “connected” youth, those who volunteer or participate in a civic or social organization, are far more likely to be connected with work and schooling and to benefit by translating new skills and social capital into better job opportunities.

![Volunteerism linked to lower likelihood of disconnection among low-income youth](image)

Data from Opportunity Nation’s "Connecting Youth and Strengthening Communities" report.

Is there a special opportunity here for North Carolina? Absolutely – because right now we’re not doing a very good job getting our youth or young adults connected. According to
Opportunity Nation’s “Opportunity Index,” a blended measure of economic, educational, and community indices related to youth welfare, North Carolina ranks just 35th among the states and not one of our 100 counties earns an “A” grade. Take a look to see how your county ranks in this measure of youth opportunity and well-being.

Youth Civic Engagement Levels in North Carolina:

![Graph showing youth civic engagement levels in North Carolina.](image)

Data from IEI's “2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index.”

As part of IEI’s wider effort to encourage more civic engagement in the state, we are launching “Summer in the Commons” – an initiative that aims to bring at least 1,000 young persons ages 8-20 to the Emerging Issues Commons for facilitated engagement activities this summer. Please let us know if you have a student group that would like to be involved via an in-person visit to Hunt Library or a facilitated online event. You’ll find full details here.

Warmly,

Anita

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