

# YouthVote.us

A Program of Online Youth Services



We cannot always build the future for our youth, but  
**we can build our youth for the future.**

-- Franklin D. Roosevelt

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## **Mission & Vision**

### *Mission*

YouthVote.us seeks to educate the youth of America about all facets of the United States government and to engage them in the political process.

Through a robust portfolio of unique online-based services and strategic partnerships with other organizations, YouthVote.us aims to inspire and motivate all youth to play an active role in their future, the future of their fellow citizens and the future of the country.

### *Vision*

YouthVote.us envisions a society where the government and democratic process not only become of interest to youth, but are recognized as a vital component in the life of an American citizen.

## Introduction

Through a wide range of unique services, YouthVote.us educates youth about the country they live in, engages them in the political process and inspires them to continue playing an active role in the future of this great nation.

Only 50% of youth feel that voting, the epitome of democracy and self-governance, is important<sup>1</sup>. This is a continuing downward trend that YouthVote.us hopes to change.

YouthVote.us approaches this challenge in three different ways:

- Providing services directly to youth
- Assisting governing bodies, educational institutions, and communities in promoting educating youth and promoting active involvement among youth.
- Partnering with Like-Minded Organizations to inform, engage and inspire.

## Inspiring Youth

YouthVote.us understands that it is key not only to inform and engage youth, but to also inspire them to action; to help them understand the crucial role they play in this democracy.

Through an innovative strategy, YouthVote.us not only provides an exciting learning experience, but also provides an avenue for youth to apply the learned materials in a personal way.

## YouthVote.us Public Web Site

The YouthVote.us public web site (<http://www.youthvote.us>) is a public portal through which youth can learn about the United States government, discuss national issues and connect with their peers and elected officials. Cutting edge resources such as streaming video and interactive presentations coupled with a wide variety of outlets to voice their opinion through, youth are provided with an exciting and intriguing view into the world around them and exposure to the perspectives of their peers and society as a whole.

A majority of the content is presented based on the interests of youth nationwide as well as on a youth-by-youth basis.

### Informing Youth

The YouthVote.us public web site provides a wealth of information throughout the web site. Youth are encouraged to discuss all of the content, express their views and ask questions about the information provided.

The placement of dynamic content on the website, such as current events, is based on youth feedback, demographics and location. As the needs and interests of youth change, so does their experience on the public web site. Certain information, mainly that supplied by outside sources, is considered “global information” and appears at all times regardless of the above information<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 2002 CIRCLE Survey - Youth Civic Engagement: Snapshots of Attitudes, Influences and Opportunities (<http://www.civicyouth.org/>)

<sup>2</sup>This includes, but is not limited to, educational content, information about the political parties and feedback polls.

### *Educational information*

Educational information is embedded in related content, current events and interactive applications throughout the web site as well as arranged by topic. Some sample topics are:

- Structure of the Federal Government
- The Constitution & Bill of Rights
- Political Parties - What are they?
- Presidential Election Process

### *Current Events*

Current events surrounding state or national issues are a staple of the YouthVote.us program. Current events are utilized as the catalysts for conversation, debate and learning.

### *Bills and Legislation*

Bills and legislation are hand-selected based on youth interests and factual summaries explaining the purpose, scope and impact are developed and presented to the youth.

Multiple viewpoints are presented to provide the beginning basis for discussion. Youth may weigh in and voice their opinions. Whenever possible, the sponsor of the bill and/or subject matter experts will be engaged.

### *Political Party Information*

A “home page” within the YouthVote.us community will exist for all political parties participating in the YouthVote.us program. By default, content containing key information about the political party and an explanation of their principles and platform is available to youth<sup>3</sup>.

The political parties will have the option, and will be encouraged to, expand their content to provide a more comprehensive presence.

## **Engaging Youth**

Connecting youth with their peers and initiating discussion is the first step in engaging youth.

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<sup>3</sup> This information is mainly provided by the political parties themselves and does not reflect the opinions of YouthVote.us, Online Youth Services or its employees, volunteers, supporters or affiliates.

### *Discussion forums*

Discussion and healthy debate are encouraged about any topic that youth feel are important and is of political or social significance.

Permanent discussions boards are available for general discussion or are centered around preset topics. As well, temporary discussion forums are integrated into current events information, educational materials and other selected web site content.

### *Chat Rooms*

Moderated chat rooms are utilized for regularly-scheduled sessions on hot topics or as they are requested by the youth.

Chat rooms are also utilized for Q&A sessions with specials guests, communication with elected officials, etc.

### *Question & Answer Sections*

#### Static Q&A Sections

Static Question and Answer sections are embedded throughout the educational content to answer some of the most commonly-asked questions by youth.

#### Interactive Q&A Sections

Interactive Q&A sections are topic-based and provide an opportunity for youth to ask specific questions of subject matter experts.

### *Meet Your Elected Officials*

Throughout the public web site, youth are provided the opportunity to interact with their elected officials. Communications tools are provided as explained in the section entitled "*Partnering with Elected Officials*"

### *Connecting Youth with Local Resources*

The YouthVote.us provides a directory of local organizations and programs available to youth by zip code. Youth may browse listings of local resources available in their area and view their detailed program information and contact information.

## **Voter Registration**

YouthVote.us is committed to promoting voter registration on a continuing basis.

Directions on how to register as well as registration forms are available for anywhere in the nation. With the wide communication mediums available to YouthVote.us, other tools such as reminders and targeted advertising will be utilized.

YouthVote.us also seeks to partner with other web sites frequented by youth through a service called Online Voting Partnership. Service announcements and reminders are sent out jointly to registered members of partner sites (*where applicable*) and joint initiatives are pursued as appropriate.

To increase the quantity of voter registration drives, YouthVote.us provides youth voter registration kits as a part of a turn-key voter registration program for communities and organizations to utilize.

## **Partnering with Educational Institutions**

Educational institutions are key to involving youth in the political process as the first point of contact. In addition to the YouthVote.us public web site, *YouthVote.us* provides a set of services and solutions for educational institutions known as *StudentsInDemocracy*. The *StudentsInDemocracy* service provides educational institutions with the essential tools required to provide a fresh approach to civic education and most importantly: inform, engage and inspire youth. The entire service consists of several elements.

### **Custom Portal System**

The Custom Portal System is a core component of the *StudentsInDemocracy* service, bringing the YouthVote.us program to a local level while retaining access to the national YouthVote.us community.

By default, the Custom Portal System contains:

- Current events and news articles
- A mix of class-level, school-level, and public YouthVote.us web site discussion forums
- Upcoming YouthVote.us Events
- An Initial Opinion Poll Ranking Important Issues

#### *Customization*

Educators and administrators are provided with easy-to-use tools to customize and maintain their custom portals.

A branded version of the YouthVote.us web site, most of the portal content can be customized on a district, school, and/or class level to accommodate the needs of the educational institution.

Educators can create their own content or insert pre-generated content, called Web Bits, such as educational information, current events, bills and legislation information and discussion boards from the content library.

In addition, many elements from the YouthVote.us public site such as polls, discussions, chat room schedules, Q&A sessions and featured web casts may be embedded to connect with their peers outside of their school system.

Because of the flexible nature of the Custom Portal System, educators may implement the portal any way they see fit; The possibilities are limited only by the educators themselves.

## **Tools**

Educators are provided with a library of easy-to-use tools to integrate the national resources of YouthVote.us into their curriculum. Among these are:

- Supplemental Curriculum Generation

Educators may create and save educational materials such as current event class hand-outs. Educators can base the documents on the content that is in the class portal (so that the civic education can extend outside of the classroom) or create the documents from scratch, including in it any of the Web Bits available.

If applicable, when Web Bits are added to hand-outs, a set of pre-defined question and discussion points may optionally be included.

- Material Library / Directory

YouthVote.us provides a directory of web sites that offer free civic education materials that would be applicable to the classroom.

## **Connecting Educators Together**

YouthVote.us believes that the best new ideas come from those who utilize the service.

Because the StudentsInDemocracy service is flexible and educators may utilize it in varied fashions, YouthVote.us encourages educators to share implementation ideas, not only with Online Youth Services, but directly with their peers as well.

## **Representing Democracy in Student Government**

YouthVote.us encourages educational systems to re-enforce the role of class officers as representatives of the youth. To help facilitate this, YouthVote.us offers a turn-key program for class officers and educational administration.

*For more information, please contact [info@youthvote.us](mailto:info@youthvote.us).*

## **Providing Feedback to Educators**

Keeping educators informed about the views and interests of youth is key to sustaining youth interest. Information obtained from YouthVote.us polls and external polls will be available to educators on a variety of topics at a national or local level. Occasionally, Educators will be notified when highlighted information is available.

## Partnering With Elected Officials

YouthVote.us provides elected officials on the state and federal level with an avenue to connect with youth within their constituency and beyond. The amount of involvement with the YouthVote.us program can be determined by the elected officials. This is accomplished by providing several opt-in services.

### Home Page

The home page is the elected official's presence in the YouthVote.us community. It can consist of one page or an entire site and utilized for informational purposes only or to serve as a base for outreach to the youth, utilizing interactive items like polls, discussion forums and scheduled chat sessions.

The home page service is designed to be quick and easy to build, requiring no technical knowledge. Simple powerful home pages can be built in as little as 60 seconds.

If an elected official chooses not to create a home page with the following information will be provided along with a note stating that "This elected official has opted not to participate in the YouthVote.us program. Please visit their web site at ..."

- Position
- Party Affiliation (*if applicable*)
- Web Site Link
- Contact Information

*It is suggested to elected officials that any biographical information in their home page be presented as a "personal" view of themselves as opposed to a purely professional view.*

### Outreach

Elected Officials are encouraged to participate regularly in discussion forums on the public YouthVote.us web site surrounding current events, local and national. In addition, there are specific services catering to the needs of elected officials.

#### *Limited-Focus Q & A Chat Sessions*

Elected officials can quickly set up question & answer sessions focused on the elected official's contingency. The question & answer sessions can be utilized for connecting to youth real-time and can be focused on a particular topic or a general Q&A "Connect with the Youth" session.

When a limited-focus Q & A chat session is set up, youth will automatically be notified through advertising on the public web site and a notification email.

### *National Q & A Chat Sessions*

Question & answer sessions can be arranged on a national level. These question & answer sessions usually are focused on a particular topic and are scheduled through YouthVote.us staff to prevent scheduling conflicts.

When a global question and answer session is arranged, a special event advertisement will appear for all YouthVote.us visitors and all members will be send a notification email.

*Occasionally, elected officials will be invited to participate in a highlighted national Q&A chat session with youth.*

### *Live Webcasts*

Live webcasts can be utilized for connecting with an elected officials' constituency. The webcasts can be used as a more personal approach for Q&A sessions or to inform youth about current issues. Optionally, when webcasts are created, they can be archived and automatically made available on the elected official's home page.

### *Soliciting Feedback*

#### Public Polls

In addition to the ability to add polls to their home pages, polls can be embedded in related sections of the web site for youth either within their constituency or nationwide. The implementation of these polls are facilitated by YouthVote.us staff.

Additional features can be added to these polls including the ability to implement a re-occurring poll to derive trends and attach discussion forums to further engage youth on the topic.

### *Research & Statistics*

A large database of information and statistics is available through the InfoExchange program. Elected officials can quickly view and analyze this data with real-time data comparison and drilling.

Statistics ranging from YouthVote.us poll results to the census data to web site activity can be correlated and/or filtered by demographic and/or geographic attributes.

Information from outside sources, such as polling services, is cataloged and available for reference. Some of this information, based on agreements between Online Youth Services and the entity, may be directly available for integration into data analysis.

Standardized pre-generated statistics and charts are available for quick reference and analysis of an elected official's YouthVote.us activity and online outreach efforts.

## **Working with Like-Minded Organizations**

YouthVote.us recognizes the incredible progress already made by current organizations and seeks to further support these organizations.

### **Connecting Youth to Other Organizations**

Organizations, based on their mission, vision and scope, can be listed as a resource for youth. Events held by these organizations, including voter registration campaigns can be listed and advertised through YouthVote.us.

### **Research & Information Sharing**

YouthVote.us seeks to increase the effectiveness of like-minded organizations and provides statistical data and analysis services through Online Youth Service's InfoExchange program. This includes statistics (*see section entitled "Feedback and Statistics"*) and information sharing.

## **Special Event Coverage**

YouthVote.us covers special events, including election coverage on the state and federal level. Each event is treated independently and information about planned activities can be requested by emailing [info@youthvote.us](mailto:info@youthvote.us).

## **Ensuring Non-Partisanship**

YouthVote.us does not represent nor endorse any entity, including, but not limited to political parties, elected officials or candidates for office. To do this would undermine the very mission and vision of the program. It is YouthVote.us's duty to ensure that

- Information provided for the web site, including but not limited to information provided by political parties, is appropriate for its purpose.
- No political party shall dominate any web site or service that is not intended to portray party-specific information<sup>4</sup>.

## **Statistics & Information Sharing**

All statistics are available through Online Youth Service's InfoExchange program. Some of the statistics included are:

- Results from Web Site Polls
- Basic Public Web Site Activity Statistics (including demographic information)
- Voter Registration Statistics

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<sup>4</sup> While it is the intention of the YouthVote.us program to provide a balanced view, Online Youth Services does not have control over the level of participation by any political party. All participating political parties will be given an equal opportunity to engage in activities contained within the YouthVote.us web site.

Information sharing is an important aspect of the YouthVote.us program. Through InfoExchange, information pertaining to the research, development, deployment and running of like-minded organizations can be shared and dispersed on a national level.