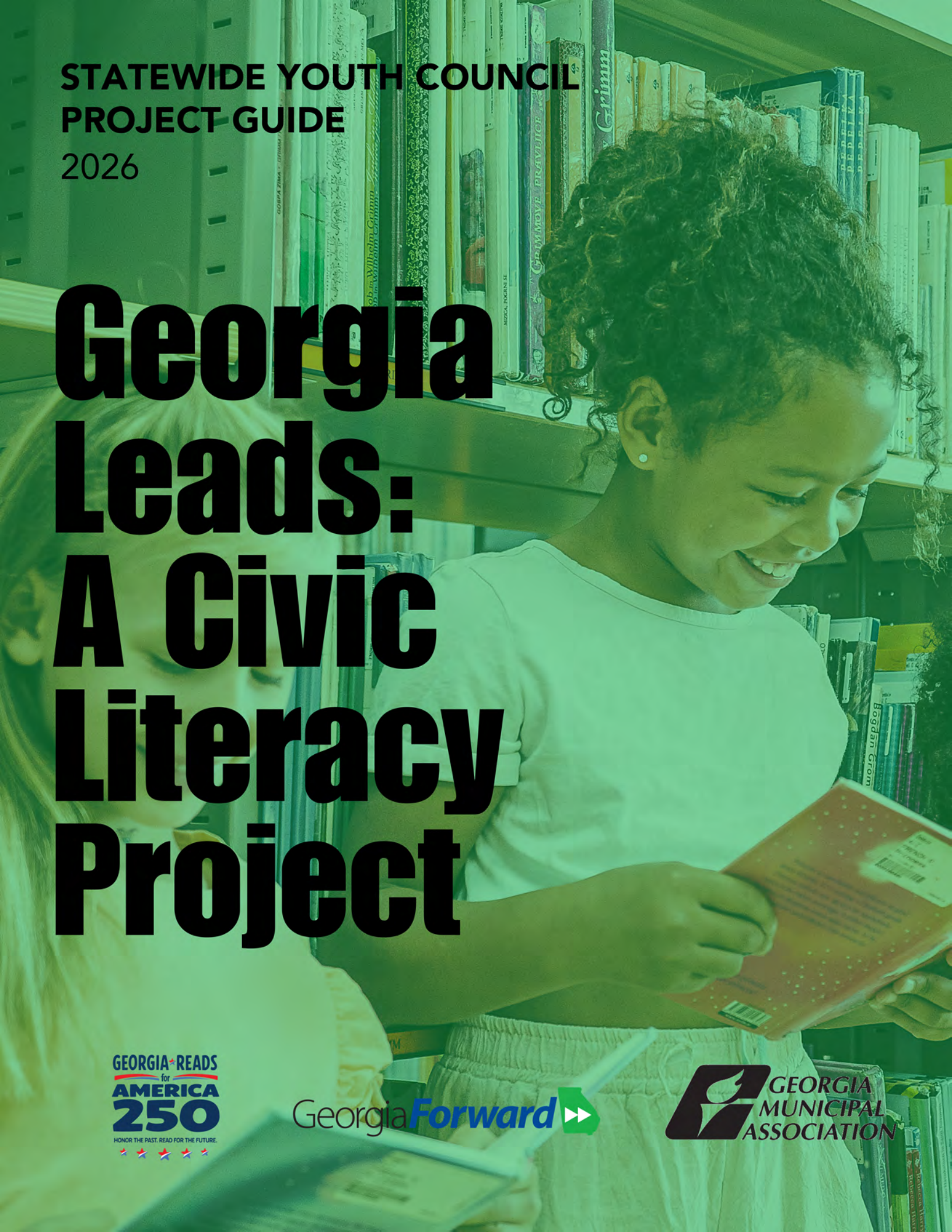
STATEWIDE YOUTH COUNCIL
PROJECT GUIDE
2026

Georgia Leads: A Civic Literacy Project



GEORGIA READS for AMERICA 250
HONOR THE PAST. READ FOR THE FUTURE.

GeorgiaForward

GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

Georgia Leads: A Civic Literacy Project

STATEWIDE YOUTH COUNCIL PROJECT GUIDE

LETTER FROM GEORGIA FORWARD

Dear Georgia Youth Councils -

As we embark on another exciting year of youth leadership and civic engagement across Georgia, we celebrate your continued commitment to building stronger, more informed, and more connected communities. Your work as Youth Councils represents the very best of Georgia's next generation — a generation that listens, leads, and acts to make a difference.

Collaboration has always been at the heart of the Youth Council movement. Across cities and counties, young leaders from diverse backgrounds come together, bringing unique voices, ideas, and experiences to create meaningful change. It's through this collaboration that powerful, youth-driven projects take shape and communities grow stronger.

This year, as we look ahead to **America250**, the nationwide celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary, we invite you to focus on a theme that lies at the core of strong democracy: **Civic Literacy**. Understanding how our government works, how communities make decisions, and how each of us plays a role in shaping the future is key to building a more engaged and informed Georgia.

To help guide your journey, we are proud to share the Statewide Youth Council Project Guide. This resource is designed to **support you and your Council** as you explore, design, and implement a civic literacy project that reflects your community's needs and your passion for service. Inside, you'll find tools, inspiration, and examples to help you plan your project from start to finish, while connecting your efforts to the broader story of America's past, present, and future.

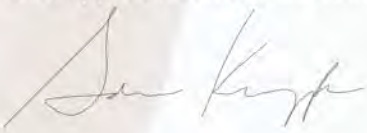
Through this year's statewide focus, we aim to:

- Deepen youth understanding of civic processes and democratic values.
- Encourage local engagement with America250 celebrations and themes.
- Empower young leaders to create innovative projects that strengthen civic participation.

As members of Georgia's Youth Councils, you have the power to shape how the next generation participates in democracy. We can't wait to see the creativity, insight, and leadership you bring to this year's projects.

Together, let's celebrate our shared history, strengthen our communities, and build the foundation for the next 250 years of civic life.

With appreciation and excitement,



Sadie Krawczyk
Managing Director, Georgia*Forward*

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2026 STATEWIDE YOUTH COUNCIL PROJECT

This year marks an exciting milestone... **the launch of the first-ever Statewide Youth Council Project**. Designed especially for Georgia's Youth Councils, this guide provides a common framework for collaboration, creativity, and civic engagement across our state. Together, we are setting the foundation for a new tradition of shared learning and statewide impact. Through this guide, youth leaders will take part in a statewide initiative focused on building civic understanding while strengthening one of the most powerful tools for learning and leadership: **READING**

Each year, Georgia's Youth Councils develop local projects that address issues important to young people and the places they call home. This year's statewide theme - **Civic Literacy-** explores what it truly means to be an informed, engaged, and empowered citizen. Civic literacy is more than knowing how government works; it's about understanding our shared responsibilities, the value of diverse voices, and the importance of access to knowledge.

In connection with **America250**, the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, this year's theme invites Youth Councils to celebrate the power of ideas, stories, and education in shaping our democracy. **By combining civic learning with reading**, your Council can help ensure that every young person has access to the books, resources, and opportunities that inspire informed participation and lifelong learning.

Projects are **youth-led** and supported by your Youth Council advisor, community partners, and local leaders. As you design and implement your project, consider how reading can become a pathway to civic engagement: hosting book drives, creating reading spaces, organizing community discussions, or highlighting authors and stories that reflect the principles of democracy and citizenship.

This guide provides you with the tools and inspiration to bring your project to life, from brainstorming ideas and planning your approach to collaborating with local partners and measuring impact.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your Youth Council plan, create, and carry out a meaningful Civic Literacy Project in your community. Use it as a roadmap to spark ideas, organize your efforts, and connect your work to the statewide theme and America250 celebration.

As you explore the guide:

- **Learn**: Review background information on civic literacy and the power of reading to strengthen communities.
- **Discuss**: Use the conversation starters to reflect on what civic literacy means to you and your peers.
- **Plan**: Follow the project planning steps and templates to outline your goals, activities, and partnerships.
- **Act**: Put your ideas into motion – launch your project, track your progress, and celebrate your impact.
- **Share**: Tell your story! Document your project and share your outcomes with other Youth Councils across Georgia.

Understanding the Issues

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Civic literacy is the knowledge and understanding of how our communities, governments, and institutions work and how each of us plays a role in shaping them. It's about knowing your rights and responsibilities, understanding how decisions are made, and recognizing the power of participation. When young people are civically literate, they're better equipped to lead, advocate, and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

This year, Georgia's Youth Councils are exploring civic literacy through the lens of reading and access to books, because informed citizens begin as informed readers. Books open doors to new ideas, perspectives, and histories that strengthen our understanding of democracy and belonging. By encouraging reading, discussion, and curiosity, Youth Councils can help their peers and communities build the knowledge and confidence needed to take part in civic life — today and for generations to come.

38%

of Georgia's third-graders are reading at grade level

UNDERSTANDING LITERACY

Literacy is foundational to individual opportunity and community strength. In Georgia, nearly 800,000 adults are estimated to have low literacy skills, limiting their ability to engage fully in work, civic life, and lifelong learning. For our youth, the challenge is also clear: only about 38 % of Georgia's third-graders are reading at grade level, and more than half of eighth-graders fall short of proficiency. Failure to read well early on can lead to a cascade of difficulties, including higher dropout rates, lower earnings, and fewer pathways to leadership and civic participation.

Tackling literacy isn't just about reading books, it's about expanding potential and strengthening the civic fabric of Georgia communities. When young people gain strong literacy skills, they are better equipped to understand their government, advocate for issues they care about, and participate meaningfully in their communities.

Planning Your Project

THE WHO:

It's Up to YOU! However, consider the potential audiences for your project.

- Your audience could include elementary or middle school students, peers in your community, families, or residents with limited access to books or resources.
- Partners might include your city or county government, local libraries, schools, bookstores, nonprofits, or community centers.

Example: Partner with your local library to host a "Civic Storytime" where Youth Council members read books about leadership, community, or American history to younger children.

THE WHAT:

It's up to YOU, again!
Decide what your project will focus on. What kind of activity, event, or initiative will help promote civic literacy through reading?

- Could your Council organize discussions, debates, or essay contests about democracy or community leadership?
- Think about what kind of impact you want your project to make — and how reading connects to that goal.

Example: Start a "Books for Democracy" campaign to collect and distribute books that highlight citizenship, government, or community leadership.

Planning Your Project

THE WHEN:

It's Up to You! Though we recommend completing the project and turning in the report by November 1st if possible.
Determine when your project will take place and how long it will last.

- Consider planning your project around key dates such as Constitution Day (September 17), or Independence Day (July 4).
- Set clear timelines for preparation, promotion, and reflection.

💡 Example: Run a month-long reading drive in March, "Read Across XYZ Town" — culminating in a community celebration during National Library Week in April.

THE WHERE:

You guessed it, up to YOU! Think about where your project will have the greatest impact.

- Could it take place at your local library, city hall, school, park, or community event?
- Would a virtual or hybrid project reach more people?
- Consider visibility — choose locations where your project will engage the most youth and families.

💡 Example: Set up a "Civic Reading Corner" inside city hall or the local community center, filled with donated books that celebrate history, leadership, and civic life.

Key Definitions

Establishing a shared vocabulary can help guide conversations about Civic Literacy. Here are some key words and concepts that you might come across during the project planning, execution, and reporting.

Advocacy – Speaking up or taking action to support a cause or bring about change.

Civic Literacy – Understanding how government and communities work, and knowing how to participate as an informed citizen.

Citizen – A member of a community, state, or nation who has rights and responsibilities.

Civic Engagement – Taking part in activities that help improve your community or influence government decisions.

Civic Responsibility – The duty of citizens to be informed, respect others, follow laws, and contribute to their community.

Democracy – A system of government where people have the power to make decisions, often through elected representatives.

Information Literacy – Knowing how to find, evaluate, and use information responsibly.

Legislation – A law or group of laws created by a government body.

Literacy – The ability to read, write, and use information to learn and communicate.

Media Literacy – Understanding how news, social media, and other forms of communication influence what we think and believe.

Public Service – Work or actions that serve the needs and interests of the community, often through government or volunteer roles.

Policy – A plan or rule made by government or organizations to address an issue or guide decisions..

Reading Proficiency – The ability to read with accuracy, understanding, and fluency.

SAMPLE AGENDA:
INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

TIME ESTIMATE: 50-60 MINUTES

TOPIC/WHO/TIME	CONTENT POINTS
Welcome and Introductions 4 minutes	• Welcome the group. Include introductions if there are new members of the Youth Council • Ask the group if anyone needs to share a thought or feeling to remain present before beginning today's conversation. • Introduce any additional facilitators (Best practice is to allow teens to facilite as much as possible)
Introduce the Topic Facilitator(s) 4 minutes	• Use this guide and prior research to introduce the topic of the project.
Group Agreements Review Facilitator(s) 2 minutes	• Work with the entire group to develop a list of norms or defined expectations for the group. • Be prepared to review Group Agreements during each subsequent meeting together.
Opening Activity Facilitator(s) 7 minutes	• Open the session with an Icebreaker of your choosing. See the Appendix for options on this. • Begin by asking participants: o Do you remember when you first learned to read? What was it like? o What have you read about the government? Did reading help you understand your role as a citizen?
Main Discussion Facilitator(s) 25 minutes	• Facilitate conversation using the guide Conversation Starters on page 12. • Allow participants to discuss items and encourage them to think about how this might inform how they design their project.
Reflection Facilitator(s) 5 minutes	• Always include time for Reflection to help Council members reflect on key insights and see opportunities for more conversation. • Reassure Council members that the conversation will continue when it is time to begin the formal planning process.
Closing and Transition Advisor 3 minutes	• Check in with any Council members who seem like they might be feeling dysregulated (mad, sad, scared or disappointed). • Tell any Council members who did not share (for whatever reason) during the meeting, that you would like to offer them the first opportunity to speak at the next meeting. • Provide youth with clear instructions for the transition to their topic or activity. • Be sure to take care of yourself as well. Set up your self-care plan following the meeting.

SAMPLE AGENDA:
PLANNING THE PROJECT

TIME ESTIMATE: 50-60 MINUTES

TOPIC/WHO/TIME	CONTENT POINTS
Welcome and Introductions 4 minutes	• Greet the group and welcome any new members. • Invite participants to share how they're feeling or anything they'd like to say before starting. • Introduce any additional facilitators. (Whenever possible, let youth lead the session!)
Review Previous Session(s) Facilitator(s) 4 minutes	• Use this guide and prior discussions to introduce the topic of the project. • Remind Council members of previous discussions and what the group is working towards.
Group Agreements Review Facilitator(s) 2 minutes	• Review the group's agreed-upon norms or expectations for discussion. • These should promote respect, inclusion, and active listening.
Opening Activity Facilitator(s) 7 minutes	• Begin with an activity that helps the group start thinking creatively about civic literacy and reading in your community. Try a short brainstorm, prompt, or icebreaker that connects to your project's purpose. • For Example, ask: "What challenges do you see in our community when it comes to reading or book access?" or "Where have you seen people learning or leading through reading?"
Main Discussion Facilitator(s) 30 minutes	• Guide the group through a structured discussion using the **Project Planning Template** as your roadmap. Move step-by-step through each section: o Who: Identify your audience and potential partners. Who will benefit from your project, and who can help make it happen? o What: Brainstorm possible project ideas. What kinds of activities, events, or campaigns connect reading and civic engagement in your community? o When: Determine your timeline. What milestones or key dates make sense for your project? o Where: Choose a location or format that fits your goals — a school, library, park, or virtual setting. • Encourage open participation, record everyone's ideas, and look for patterns or shared interests. Narrow down your focus by voting or combining ideas that best align with your community's needs and your Council's capacity.
Reflection Facilitator(s) 5 minutes	• Invite Youth Council members to share what stood out during the planning process. Ask these question to generate discussion: o "What excites you most about the project we're shaping?" o "What steps should we take next to bring our ideas to life?" • Summarize key takeaways and confirm any decisions made about the project's direction.
Closing and Transition Advisor 3 minutes	• Wrap up by outlining next steps and assigning light follow-up tasks (e.g., research, contacting potential partners, or finalizing a project proposal). • Reassure Council members that this is just the beginning of the planning process and their ideas will continue to grow as they gather more input and fill in details using the Project Planning Template. • End the meeting with appreciation and encouragement. Remind members to take care of themselves, reflect on what they learned, and come prepared to continue developing the project at your next meeting.

TEEN FACILITATOR TIPS

Serving as a facilitator for conversations with your peers is a big responsibility!

PREPARE YOURSELF

- Read the Facilitator Guidelines as well as supplemental resources as necessary.
- Reflect on the Conversation Starter Topics in advance with your Advisor as necessary
- Read the Guide and Agenda to make sure you have gathered all materials as necessary.

FACILITATION TIPS

Teens with diverse backgrounds and experiences participate in the Youth Councils. Each member may have different experiences with the topic. It is essential to create a safe and inclusive space and use facilitation practices that allow each person to speak and be heard.

ACTIVE FACILITATION

Help guide the discussion and engage fully alongside your fellow Youth Council members. By doing so, you'll help create a genuine, open space where everyone feels safe to speak and connect. Use good judgment in what you choose to share, remembering that your role is to be an active participant — not an observer. You don't need to have all the answers; your value comes from sharing your own perspective and supporting others as they share theirs. Encourage participation from everyone, but be mindful not to pressure anyone who isn't ready or comfortable speaking.

USE A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Every Youth Council member communicates and participates differently. Draw on what you know about your peers — their personalities, strengths, and preferred ways of expressing themselves — to help you lead discussions effectively. Along with open conversation, offer alternative ways for members to engage, such as writing reflections or journaling. You might also use tools like a KWL Chart (What I Know, Want to know, and Learned) to capture insights and track how everyone's understanding grows throughout the project.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR TOPIC ENGAGEMENT

- "What stood out to you most about this topic, and why?"
- "How does this issue show up in our community or in your own experiences?"
- "What's one idea or action we could take to make a difference?"
- "Did anyone hear something today that made you think differently or see a new perspective?"

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Topic 1: Building a Safe and Inclusive Space
Creating a safe and welcoming space is the foundation for every meaningful conversation. Each person brings unique experiences and perspectives, and everyone should feel respected and heard. This discussion helps set group norms that encourage openness, honesty, and kindness.

Topic 2: What Does Civic Literacy Mean to Us?
Civic literacy is about understanding how our communities and governments work and how we can be active participants in shaping them. In this conversation, we'll discuss what being "civically literate" means to us, why it matters, and how reading helps us stay informed and inspired to take part in our communities.

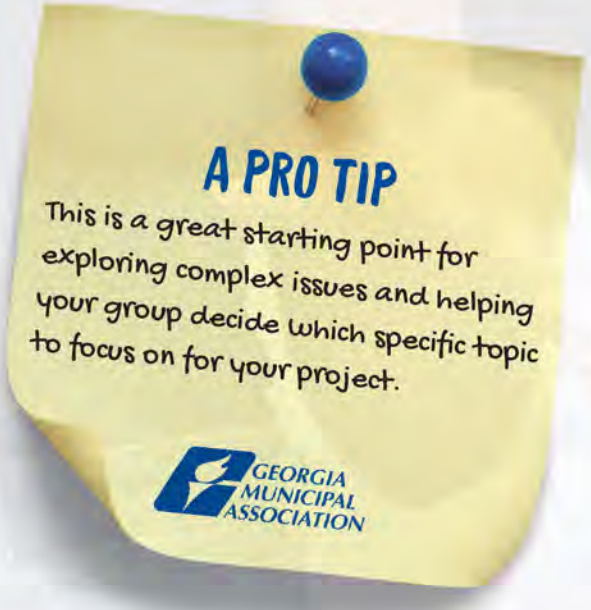
Topic 3: The Power of Reading in Building Understanding
Books introduce us to new ideas, people, and perspectives, and they help us understand our role in the world. This discussion invites everyone to share a story, book, or author that has helped them see their community or country in a new light. Together, we'll explore how reading can strengthen empathy and civic awareness.

Topic 4: Barriers to Reading and Access
Not everyone has the same access to books or resources that build literacy. In this conversation, we'll talk about what makes it hard for people for especially young people, to get books or reading opportunities. What can we do as Youth Council members to help close that gap and make reading more accessible to everyone in our community?

Topic 5: Connecting Reading to Leadership and Action
Civic literacy is more than learning. It's about DOING. This conversation encourages your group to think about how reading and knowledge can inspire real-world action. What books, stories, or lessons have sparked your interest in leadership or community service? How can you turn those ideas into a local project?

Topic 6: Telling Our Community's Story
Every community has its own story to tell, through books, local authors, history, and lived experiences. This discussion invites members to think about how reading and storytelling can highlight voices in your community and preserve local history. How might your project help others discover those stories and feel proud of where they come from?

Topic 7: Reflecting on Our Civic Literacy Journey
As your project unfolds, take time to pause and reflect. This conversation focuses on what you've learned about civic literacy, reading, and leadership. What moments have stood out? What impact have you seen? Reflection helps your group celebrate progress and imagine what's next for your Council, and for your community.



PROJECT PLANNING TEMPLATE

Instructions: *Utilize this guide to help your Youth Council develop the project. Be as thorough as possible and consider this a "living document" that the group can return to at any time to update as the project evolves.*

Project Title *What will you call your project? Choose a name that reflects your focus and community.*	
Project Purpose / Goal *What do you hope to achieve? How does your project connect to civic literacy and reading?*	
Community Need *What issue or gap are you addressing? Who will benefit from your project?*	
Target Audience *Who do you want to reach (youth, families, schools, community members)?*	
Project Description *Describe what you plan to do — events, activities, campaigns, etc.*	

PROJECT PLANNING TEMPLATE (cont.)

Instructions: *Utilize this guide to help your Youth Council develop the project. Be as thorough as possible and consider this a "living document" that the group can return to at any time to update as the project evolves.*

Partners & Resources *Who can help (libraries, schools, city staff, nonprofits, local authors)? What resources or materials will you need (books, space, supplies, volunteers)?*	
Timeline *When will you plan, promote, and complete your project? List key milestones or dates.*	
Roles & Responsibilities *Who is doing what? Assign tasks to Council members and advisors.*	
Promotion & Outreach *How will you spread the word? (social media, flyers, school announcements, city website, etc.)*	
Evaluation & Impact *How will you measure success? (books collected, people reached, events held, feedback gathered)*	
Reflection *What did you learn through this project? How did it strengthen your understanding of civic literacy and community leadership?*	

PROJECT REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Think about these questions as a group and individually, and respond. As you think about how to present this project at Youth Forum, Symposium, and othe community events, incorporate some of these responses into your presentation.

What impact did your project have on your community and on you personally?

What did you learn about civic literacy and why it matters?

How did reading or access to books play a part in your project's success?

Which part of the project are you most proud of?

What challenges did your group face, and how did you overcome them?

What's next? How could your Youth Council build on this work in the future?

Icebreaker Options

Book That Built Me
Time: 5–7 minutes
Purpose: Connect reading to personal growth and civic awareness.

Instructions:
Ask each participant to name one book (or article, poem, or even social media post) that has influenced how they see the world or their community.
Prompt them to briefly share:
- What the book was about
- What they learned from it
- How it relates to being an informed or engaged citizen

Reading Relay
Time: 10 minutes
Purpose: Energize the group while highlighting the importance of literacy.

Instructions:
Bring a few short, civic-themed quotes (for example, from historical figures, authors, or the Constitution).
Have each participant read one aloud in turn. After each reading, ask:
- What does this quote make you think about?
- How does it connect to leadership or service?

If I Were Mayor...
Time: 8 minutes
Purpose: Inspire imagination and link civic action to leadership.

Instructions:
Ask each participant: "If you were the mayor of your city, what's one thing you would do to help more people read, learn, or connect in your community?"

Allow each person 30–45 seconds to respond. After everyone shares, note recurring themes — these might inspire project ideas!

Civic Word Cloud
Time: 7–10 minutes
Purpose: Get youth thinking about what "civic literacy" means to them.

Instructions:
Provide paper or a shared virtual whiteboard. Ask everyone to write down 3–5 words they associate with "civic literacy" or "community leadership."
As a group, combine all the words into a single list or digital word cloud. Discuss which words appear most often and what they reveal about the group's shared values or interests.

Civic Literacy Bingo
Time: 10–12 minutes
Purpose: Build energy and find common ground among members.

Instructions:
Create a simple bingo card with prompts like:
- "Has volunteered at a library"
- "Knows the name of their city councilmember"
- "Has a favorite book about history"
- "Has visited the state capitol"
- "Owns a library card"

Give everyone a card and a pen. Participants mingle (or discuss virtually) to find others who fit each square, writing their names in the boxes. The first to get five in a row shouts "Civic Literacy!"

Additional Resources

Consider these Sources

1. **Center for American Civics (Arizona State University)**

Website: https://civics.asu.edu/civic-literacy-curriculum

Explore lessons, videos, and discussion guides that make topics like government, citizenship, and rights easy to understand. Perfect for sparking ideas about civic education and youth leadership.

2. **Center for Youth & Communities – Youth Civic Engagement Toolkit**

Website: https://cyess.org/projects/youth-civic-engagement-toolkit

A hands-on toolkit designed for youth groups. It includes templates, checklists, and examples to help young leaders take civic ideas from discussion to real-world action.

3. **iCivics**

Website: https://www.icivics.org

Founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, iCivics provides fun, game-based learning about government, civic responsibility, and leadership. Great for Youth Councils looking for engaging civic education tools.

4. **Center for Civic Education**

Website: https://learn.civiced.org

Find free e-books, activities, and learning modules about the Constitution, citizenship, and civic participation — ideal for projects tied to America250.

5. **Get Georgia Reading Campaign**

Website: https://getgeorgiareading.org

The Get Georgia Reading Campaign was formed to boost a powerful predictor of high school graduation rates and overall quality of life—third grade reading proficiency. Visit the website to access key data and learn about their framework for collective action.

6. **Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) & Georgia Reads – Literacy Resources**

Website: https://gosa.georgia.gov/resources/georgia-literacy-resources & https://georgiareads.org

Georgia's official literacy data and resource center. Find research, statistics, and programs to inform your project and highlight literacy needs in your community.

7. **250 Reading List and reading challenges**

From the library system (on Beanstack) https://www.beanstack.com/marketing-materials/us-250th-challenge

Sources Used in this Guide

Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2023). State of Literacy in Georgia: 2023 Report. Georgia Government Publications.

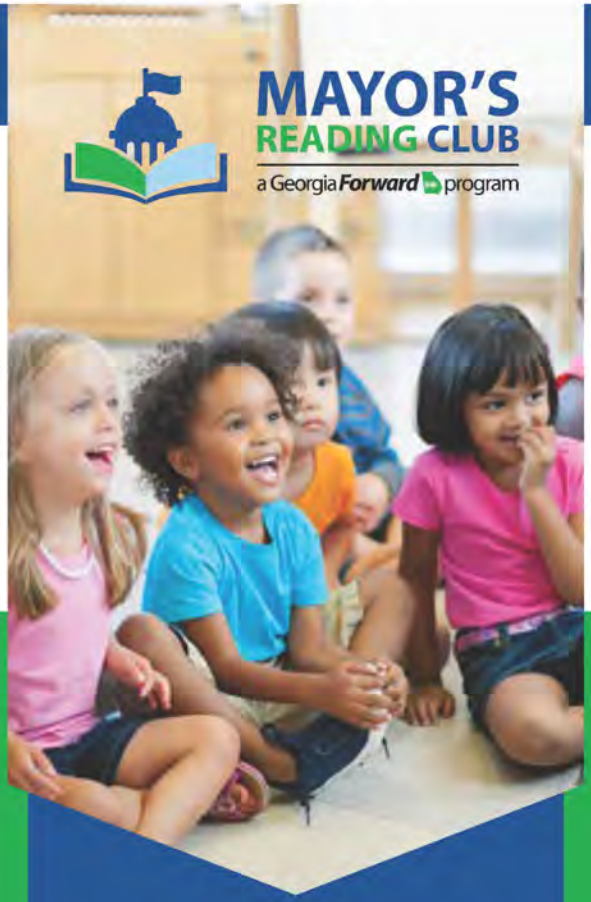
Retrieved from https://gosa.georgia.gov/document/literacy-resources/state-literacy-georgia-2023/download

Georgia Reads. (n.d.). Literacy Data in Georgia. Retrieved October 27, 2025, from https://georgiareads.org/literacy-data-in-georgia/

Additional Resources

Kennesaw State University
Bagwell School of Education

IMPACTFUL READ ALOUDS IN EARLY LITERACY MICROCREDENTIAL



The Impactful Read Alouds in Early Literacy Microcredential equips participants with essential skills to support young children's language and literacy development. It prepares civic leaders and volunteers to lead engaging storytimes and literacy experiences that build a strong foundation for future learning.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify effective read aloud strategies for young children
- Identify the focus of a book
- Recognize the power of reading and conversation with children

Microcredential Partners:
Atlanta Speech School
Kennesaw State University
Learn4Life
Share the Magic Foundation

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