VOTE16USA FIELD GUIDE

Case studies on successful local Vote16 campaigns, and how you can take action on their lessons

CASE STUDY 1: TAKOMA PARK

What happened in Takoma Park?

Takoma Park is a city in Maryland, near Washington, D.C. with a population of about 18,000. Turnout for municipal elections had consistently lagged. In October 2013, Councilmember Tim Male introduced a charter amendment to lower the voting age to 16.

The proposal faced skepticism, but proponents, who included youth, community members, and the nonprofit FairVote, overcame this by articulating the benefits and making sure young people were at the center of advocacy. Youth testimony at public hearings proved influential, and the council voted 6-1 to pass the charter amendment in May 2013. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds in Takoma Park are now allowed to vote for mayor and city council members; school board elections are controlled by the county.

Key lessons from Takoma Park, and how to act on them in your city:

1.   A strong champion on the city council gives the proposal immediate legitimacy and can help guide the effort.

Councilmember Male was a leader of the effort from the very beginning. He introduced legislation, made the issue a priority, and worked with other councilmembers to win their support. This leadership gave the effort the legitimacy and potential that led to active youth involvement in advocacy.

TAKE ACTION!	One of the first steps to a successful campaign should be cultivating a strong champion on the city council, who is eager to make Vote16 a priority and work with you to guide the campaign. Of course, this is a two way street. To get a strong champion on board, you need to demonstrate your smart plans and strong commitment as well.

2.   Youth voices are critical to the effort's success.

The proposal faced initial skepticism, and vocal activism from high school students, especially at a city council hearing, is what tipped the balance in favor of lowering the local voting age. Young people demonstrated demand for the change, showed their eagerness to vote, and ultimately won.

TAKE ACTION!	Make sure that young people are involved in as many campaign activities as possible, so that they can demonstrate demand for a lower voting age. This means having youth attend meetings with decision makers or supporters, and ensuring large turnout for public hearings and rallies.

CASE STUDY 2: HYATTSVILLE

What happened in Hyattsville?

Hyattsville is a suburb of Washington, D.C., near Takoma Park, with a population around 18,000. Following Takoma Park's success, Hyattsville city council member Patrick Paschall proposed a charter amendment to lower the city's voting age to 16 in January 2015. Youth leaders learned about the proposal and became vocal advocates. After public comment from youth and community members, the council voted 7-4 to pass the amendment.

As in Takoma Park, implementation of the new policy was aided by the fact that Maryland already allowed 16-year-olds to register to vote. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds in Takoma Park are allowed to vote for mayor and city council members; school board elections are controlled by the county.

Key lessons from Hyattsville, and how to act on them in your city:

1. **Youth voices are critical to the effort's success.**

This effort only succeeded because high school students demonstrated demand for the change and showed their eagerness to vote.

> **TAKE ACTION!** Like above, ensure youth are involved in as many campaign activities as possible, and seek out opportunities for high school students to show their demand for the change.

2. **Building on regional momentum helped the effort succeed.**

Hyattsville lowered its voting age after seeing the policy successfully passed and implemented in Takoma Park.

> **TAKE ACTION!** If possible, consider working with activists in neighboring cities to push for this change in multiple cities. It is easier to argue for a city to make the change when there is a larger wave of momentum in the region.

CASE STUDY 3: LOWELL

What happened in Lowell?

In 2009, a group led by the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) convinced the Lowell city council to vote in favor of lowering the local voting age. Based on MA laws, this meant the city sent a home rule petition to the state legislature asking for permission to hold a local referendum on lowering voting age. The petition passed in the Senate, but not in the House.

Although the campaign did not ultimately win, youth leaders were successful in building support on the local level and within the state legislature. UTEC served as the backbone of the campaign, providing staff support, training and supporting youth leaders, and giving legitimacy to the effort. Youth leaders were involved in all decision making and were at the forefront of the effort every step of the way.

Key lessons from Lowell, and how to act on them in your city:

1. Established community organizations can be the backbone for a campaign

UTEC brought many strengths and resources to the effort. The organization ensured the proper level of support for youth leaders, its staff helped arrange meetings, organized events, helped reach out to new supporters, and gave the campaign a measure of legitimacy.

TAKE ACTION! Consider working with a local organization you are active in to start a Vote16 campaign as a project of that organization.

2. Ambitious goals are worth fighting for

Massachusetts law made the path to success especially difficult, but Lowell youth embraced the challenge and ran a campaign that resulted in many tangible victories, and momentum to inspire future efforts, even though it did not ultimately lower the voting age.

TAKE ACTION! Consider the path to success and barriers that stand in your way, but know that legal, political, or other barriers do not have to prevent you from running a Vote16 campaign. Also, make sure you have tangible goals other than ultimately passing the law, such as training a certain number of youth, gaining new supporters in city and state government, and more.

CASE STUDY 4: SAN FRANCISCO

What happened in San Francisco?

In 2016, San Francisco put the question of lowering the voting age to 16 before voters as a ballot measure. More than 172,000 citizens voted in favor of the proposal, which finished just two percentage points shy of passing.

The effort began in 2014, when high school students were struck by the fact that they were impacted by local elections but had no voice in the process. Youth brought a proposal to lower the local voting age to the San Francisco Youth Commission, where the Vote16SF campaign was born. In two years, students working on the campaign earned the support of nearly every elected official and political club in the city. The Board of Education unanimously endorsed the proposal, and the Board of Supervisors voted 9-2 to put it on the ballot.

Key lessons from San Francisco, and how to act on them in your city:

1.   Find the balance between youth leadership and organizational support

Young people genuinely led the effort every step of the way, and their impact was amplified and accelerated with organizational support from the SF Youth Commission and Generation Citizen. The right balance between youth leadership and staff support was vital to success.

> **TAKE ACTION!** As you work with an organization to advocate for change, make sure that youth leaders and staff mentors have clearly defined roles and expectations, and re-evaluate this relationship often to ensure the right balance.

2.   Public education is critical, and public opinion can change dramatically

Only 36% of voters expressed support in March, but 48% voted in favor in November. In the months between, voters became educated through outreach from youth, media coverage, and communications from supportive political clubs. While some people have a negative first reaction to Vote16, many will come around after learning about the benefits.

> **TAKE ACTION!** Don't be discouraged if people respond negatively to the idea, but focus on continuing to educate them on the issue and its benefits.

CASE STUDY 5: BERKELEY

What happened in Berkeley?

In 2016, youth leaders in Berkeley successfully advocated for a ballot measure that would lower the voting age for school board elections in Berkeley to 16. The city council voted to put the measure on the ballot, and it passed with 70 percent of the vote. The city council still must vote to implement the change; 16-year-old voting for school board elections is expected to be implemented by the 2018 elections.

A group of 10-20 high school students led the campaign, supported closely by two adult mentors with knowledge of and connections to local government. Many of the youth first came together through the Youth in Government program. Youth first advocated for this change on the state level, then shifted their focus to the local level.

Key lessons from Berkeley, and how to act on them in your city:

1. **Consider local context when deciding on specific policy goals**

The effort in Berkeley focused on lowering the voting age for school board elections only, because the local effort grew out of state-level advocacy focused on school board elections. This focus shaped the campaign and may have contributed to its success.

> **TAKE ACTION!** When determining your specific policy goals (i.e. the exact change you're fighting for), think carefully about your motivation for taking on this work and what changes you and your core supporters want to see in your community as a result of the campaign.

2. **Youth voices are critical to the effort's success**.

The proposal faced initial skepticism, and vocal activism from high school students, especially at a city council hearing, is what tipped the balance in favor of lowering the local voting age. Young people demonstrated demand for the change, showed their eagerness to vote, and ultimately won.

> **TAKE ACTION!** Make sure that young people are involved in as many campaign activities as possible, so that they can demonstrate demand for a lower voting age. This means having youth attend meetings with decision makers or supporters, and ensuring large turnout for public hearings and rallies.

CASE STUDY 6: GREENBELT

What happened in Greenbelt?

Greenbelt is a city in Maryland, near Washington, D.C., with a population around 25,000. Young people on the city's Youth Advisory Committee began advocating for lowering the voting age in 2015. Their advocacy led to the city council placing a non-binding referendum question on the issue on the November 2017 ballot; 53% of residents voted yes, leading to the council voting unanimously to lower the local voting age to 16 in January 2018.

In 2015, a community questionnaire asked residents about their views on lowering the voting age and more than 70 percent were opposed. Between then and November 2017, youth successfully educated key decision makers and the public about the issue, changing minds one at a time. They also earned support from the city's Community Relations Advisory Board and Advisory Committee on Education.

Key lessons from Greenbelt, and how to act on them in your city:

1. Change takes time, and persistence pays off

Members of the Youth Advisory Committee worked for more than two years to lower the voting age in Greenbelt, and overcame several hurdles along the way. A community questionnaire showed most residents were opposed to the idea, and in 2017 the city council voted against simply lowering the voting age in favor of holding a non-binding referendum. Yet, youth remained determined and overcame each hurdle to eventually win the change.

TAKE ACTION! Remember that most campaigns will encounter obstacles, but this issue is worth fighting for, and the very act of young people continuing to advocate can change minds.

2. With youth-led public education efforts, public opinion can change dramatically

A 2015 survey showed that more than 70% of residents were opposed to the change, but in 2017 the majority voted in favor. In between, youth advocates changed minds by talking with residents one-on-one and making themselves a constant presence at community meetings and events, consistently making their case for lowering the voting age.

TAKE ACTION! Don't be discouraged, even if the majority of people seem to oppose the idea. Focus on continuing to educate them one-by-one, and remember that sometimes the simple presence of strong, persistent youth advocates will change minds as much as your argumentation.