Democracy is a verb.

Mikva Challenge
mikvachallenge.org
Our Mission

Mikva Challenge develops youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society.

Mikva Challenge knows that democracy is people taking action — speaking, engaging, learning, listening. We clear a path for young people to be involved now, and to develop confidence and habits that will serve them — and the world we share — all their lives.

Mikva alumni are three times more likely to vote than their millennial peers and twice as likely to participate in community service. Alumni have increased confidence as public speakers and stronger belief in their responsibility for solving community issues. Additionally, teachers who use Mikva curricula in their classrooms report recapturing their passion for teaching.

To date 250,000+ students have participated in Mikva Challenge programs in 22 cities/counties throughout the country. Tens of thousands more are impacted by our curricula nationwide.

50,000 Students nationwide participate in Mikva programs each year.

957 Teachers have received professional development in Action Civics to increase student engagement in the classroom.

97% Of teachers in Mikva programs reported that using Mikva curricula led to their students increasing their civic knowledge.
Our History

Mikva Challenge was founded on the premise that youth voice and participation matter, and that our civic and political life will be stronger when youth participate and help shape their own destinies.

In 1997, Mikva was founded as a tribute to former Judge, U.S. Congressman and White House Counsel — Abner Mikva — and his wife — Zoe — a teacher and lifelong education activist. The goal: to open up democratic spaces for youth living in under-resourced neighborhoods and politically marginalized communities.

A small pilot program at first — with an all-volunteer staff running an electoral engagement project in four schools — today Mikva has expanded nationally. Three chapters in California, Illinois, and Washington, DC serve as Mikva model sites and innovation hubs, while partnership sites nationwide provide curricula, training, and strategic support to school districts across the country.

For a more detailed timeline of Mikva Challenge's history, visit: mikvachallenge.org/about-us/history

“I didn’t think my voice mattered. Through Mikva, I learned that one person can make a difference.”

— Kevin Ng, Mikva Alum
Our Pledge

We clear a path for young people to use their voices and discover a passion for serving their communities.

Our Mission: to develop youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society.

Our Vision: a stronger, inclusive democracy that values youth voice.

We Believe

- By intentionally reaching out to under-resourced communities and schools, we create opportunities for youth to elevate the issues that are important to them and their community.
- Policymakers make better decisions when youth voice is included in decision-making.
- Community involvement is an essential experience for young people to have a voice in their future.
- By remaining non-partisan, we make space for young people to form their own opinions and choose the candidates and issues they want to support.

Hear from the students whose lives have been changed by Mikva Challenge: mikvachallenge.org/our-work/reflections

“What I say and do makes a difference.”
Theory of Change

Mikva Challenge’s work not only makes a real impact on teens now, but also seeds a generation of thoughtful, engaged, ethical citizens and community leaders for the future.

Creating bridges between youth and adults to allow for them to form interpersonal connections and make civic decisions together.

1 We provide.

- **Opportunity**  We provide youth with the opportunities needed in order to participate in civics.
- **Support**  We provide Action Civics youth leadership curriculum materials and professional development to teachers.
- **Connections**  We provide opportunities for youth to form interpersonal connections with adult leaders.

2 We will see.

- **Knowledge**  We will see the development of Civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.
- **Engagement**  We will see more youth engaged in civics in partnership with adults.
- **Transformation**  We will see more youth participating in civic processes, along with teachers and adults better trained to promote it in their institutions.

3 This leads to.

- **Empowerment**  This leads to empowered, informed, and active youth who promote a just and equitable society.
- **Skill**  This leads to teachers with the knowledge and confidence to implement youth-centered pedagogy and civics curriculum.
- **Inclusion**  This leads to adults who include youth in civic processes.

For detailed case studies and research papers, visit: mikvachallenge.org/white-papers

A stronger, inclusive democracy that values youth voice.
Programs

Mikva Challenge involves young people in civic engagement through hands-on, project-based learning that deeply transforms students’ civic attitudes, skills, and sense of agency. Mikva’s key areas of programming:

- **Action Civics Classrooms**
  Mikva Challenge offers a portfolio of Action Civics curricula designed for educators and youth workers to use in developing youth voice and guiding youth to take informed action. Curricula is designed by and for educators to pick and adapt lessons that best suit their context and the needs of their students.

- **Project Soapbox**
  Project Soapbox is a public speaking competition facilitated by Mikva Challenge that calls young people to speak out on issues that affect them and their communities. These powerful speeches have lasting, transformative impacts on classrooms, schools, and communities.

- **Elections & Campaign Experiences**
  Through hands-on campaign work and interactions with candidates and elected officials, Mikva Elections in Action programs empower young people to become informed about and engaged in elections – even before they are old enough to vote.

- **Youth-led Advocacy**
  Youth are given a seat at the table with city and school leaders who make public policy. Programs include participation in citywide youth councils, student voice committees, and mentoring opportunities.

For more information on Mikva’s programs, visit: mikvachallenge.org/our-work/programs
Leadership

Brian Brady, President

Brian leads the Mikva Challenge with the vision of bringing civic empowerment and political participation to all young people, especially low-income youth of color who are often left out of the democratic process. Coming from a family that was very civically engaged, Brian understood early in life the transformative impacts of learning civics by doing it. His experience as a youth worker on the West Side of Chicago reinforced for him the critical need for authentic youth voice and youth activism in low income communities and under-resourced schools.

In 19 years of leadership, Brian has helped grow Mikva Challenge from a handful of schools to one that now engages over 50,000 youth annually in Action Civics programs in over 400 schools around the country. Brian coined the term “Action Civics” in 2007 to describe the Mikva Challenge process of teaching civics via authentic experiences in the democratic process. He actively partners with numerous civic engagement organizations and leaders to build a movement around energizing youth civic engagement and bringing Action Civics to youth around the country. Currently, Brian is spearheading the expansion of Mikva’s unique model of Action Civics in Los Angeles and Washington, DC, and helping build Action Civics strategies and programs in cities around the country.

Michelle Morales, Chief Executive Officer

As the CEO of Mikva’s Illinois Chapter, Michelle brings with her over 20 years of experience in youth development. Having worked as a teacher at an alternative high school in Chicago’s Humboldt Park community, Michelle saw first hand how disempowerment and marginalization affects many youth of color – often leading youth to engage in risky choices that can impact their lives. The alternative high school taught Michelle the power of engagement and self-actualization and how respecting youth, their ideas and their voices is not only transformational for the youth involved, but also for all those around them. She brings this passion for youth voice and empowerment to Mikva Challenge. Michelle firmly believes that youth – once empowered and civically engaged – can change the landscape of Chicago and the nation.
Downloads

Photos
The Mikva Challenge story is often best told through imagery. If you would like to use one of our photos, please submit your request to: inquiries@mikvachallenge.org.

Video
The easiest way to share our videos is to link directly from our YouTube channel: @mikvachallenge.

Media
To see our most recent media hits, visit: mikvachallenge.org/media.

Fact sheets
To see our most recent fact sheets online, visit: mikvachallenge.org/fact-sheets.
Get in touch to get involved.
Together, we can help young people lead our democracy today.

**Become a Mikva Partner**
To learn more about your city or district becoming a Mikva Partner Site, visit:
[www.mikvachallenge.org/locations/partner-sites](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/locations/partner-sites)

**Explore Mikva’s Teacher Resources**
To learn more about receiving training or curricula from Mikva, visit:
[www.mikvachallenge.org/teacher-resources](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/teacher-resources)

**Dive Deeper**
To learn more about our impacts and process, visit:
[www.mikvachallenge.org/our-work](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/our-work)

**Be a Donor**
Ready to make a difference? Visit:
[www.mikvachallenge.org/get-involved/donate](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/get-involved/donate)

“Listening and working with Mikva youth leaders has helped me implement policies and programs that truly center youth needs.”