



# University of Nebraska at Omaha

## Examining Youth Civic Mobility in the Heartland

### What is the background for this study?

This study explores how young individuals aged 18-25 in the Midwest, or Heartland, of the United States perceive and engage in civic mobility within their communities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the investigation examines how these young people interact with civic life through their community organizations and institutions and how they experience upward or downward movement within their civic ecosystems.

### What are the research questions?

This study includes one primary research question and three secondary questions. The overarching research question is: How do young people in the Heartland of the United States conceptualize and experience civic mobility? The secondary research questions include:

1. What types of institutions, organizations, structures, processes, and networks make up the civic ecosystems of young people?
2. How do young people observe, participate in, and learn about civic engagement?
3. How does access to civic opportunities influence civic mobility for young people?

### What data and methods are used in this study?

This study uses a mixed-methods design, including semi-structured interviews and an online survey using a convenience sample of young people ages 18-25 in seven Midwestern states (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota). The sample includes young people in rural, suburban, and urban areas representing a range of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and economic backgrounds.

In Year 1, the Principal Investigator and a team of five undergraduate researchers co-create an interview guide to pilot in Nebraska’s rural, suburban, and urban areas. Recruitment for interviews is primarily done through higher education institutions and community organizations using e-mail and social media. The survey is conducted through Qualtrics, and the interviews are conducted using Zoom.

The research team then transcribes and codes the interviews using Atlas.ti web to identify emergent themes and to inform a new version of the interview guide to be implemented in Years 2 and 3 with new participants and a subsample of participants from Year 1. The findings from these interviews will inform a longitudinal survey instrument to examine civic mobility over time.

**Study At-A-Glance**

**Study Title**  
Examining Youth Civic Mobility in the Heartland

**Researcher**  
Jodi Benenson, PhD

**Grant Cohort** 2022

**Timeline** 2022-2025

**Study Location** Omaha, Nebraska

**Study Topic Area(s)**  
Volunteering, Nonprofit Studies, and National Service  
Youth Development

## What are potential opportunities to apply study findings and/or build on this research?

The study has three key implications for the field of civic engagement. First, it increases understanding of how young people in the Midwest conceptualize and experience civic mobility. This information can guide measures to enhance civic access and opportunity for young people in the Heartland. Individuals, organizations, and policymakers working toward civic equity in the US can use these insights.

Second, the findings center on the voices and experiences of young people in the Midwest, a part of the country where inequities exist regarding young people's participation in civic engagement. The study notes that the region has great promise and diversity in civic measures such as education, elections, and the potential for youth influence on elections and community civic culture.

Third, the study's findings can inform measures for civic mobility in the US. AmeriCorps can use study findings to understand how young people perceive civic engagement, how to increase access and opportunity for young people in the Heartland, how to recruit and retain participants in AmeriCorps programs, and to better understand how increased access to civic opportunities may influence the lives of young people in the US. The study lays the groundwork for future research that focuses on understanding how civic mobility affects young people's social, economic, and political outcomes over time.

### For more information on the study:

<b>Study Website</b>	<a href="https://civicengagementresearch.com">Home   Civic Mobility (civicengagementresearch.com)</a>			
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### About AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Research Grants

AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation holds grant competitions to foster scholarly research on civic health, address knowledge gaps in civic engagement and volunteerism, and identify new ideas and methodological approaches to service.

- Learn more about [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Research Grants](#).
- See a [Snapshot of Research Grantee Activities and Insights](#).
- Explore the [AmeriCorps Open Data Research Grantee Dataset](#).

### About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America. For more information on this study and other studies funded by AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, please contact [evaluation@americorps.gov](mailto:evaluation@americorps.gov).

### About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://americorps.gov).**