

# NEXTGEN

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# NEXTGEN

ILLINOIS

2014-2015

## Policy priorities for Illinois voted on by the young people of our state

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Hundreds of young people attend NextGen Illinois Convention on September 27th, 2014 | credit: Street-Level youth media

Young leaders share civic innovation projects such as website and datasharing ideas at the NextGen Illinois Convention | credit: Street-Level youth media



Kuumba Lynx performs at NextGen Illinois Convention | credit: Street-Level youth media

# INTRODUCTION TO NEXTGEN ILLINOIS



The NextGen Illinois project is an initiative of Young Invincibles and the Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network, in collaboration with dozens of other Illinois organizations, designed to activate young people to shape a unique policy agenda for the state of Illinois. Young adult voices are frequently overlooked in state-level political conversations, and the NextGen project aims to strengthen the youth voice by elevating shared political priorities. Over the six months leading up to the 2014 midterm elections, we worked to energize young people around state issues and asked them for solutions to some of the state's biggest challenges. We focused on the issues that matter most to our generation, and through discussions and trainings have worked to equip our participants with the tools needed to create change within their own communities.

From June to September of 2014, we met with young people from across Illinois and hosted discussions and town halls on campuses, in classrooms, and in bars to gather policy ideas. Over 700 young people, ages 14 to 34, participated in discussions about Illinois' biggest policy challenges such as education, jobs, and health care. Participants also tackled important reform questions around political corruption, money in politics, and fair elections.

On September 27, hundreds of NextGen Illinois participants came together at a state convention to vote on some of the best ideas that young people contributed throughout the process and created a cohesive 10-item agenda for Illinois.

In the pages that follow you will find the resulting agenda, containing the top 10 ideas supported by young people from all over the state. We have included a brief analysis of each policy and information on how you can help move these policies forward.



with  
support  
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report  
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**NEXTGEN ILLINOIS**

**CORE PARTNERS**

# The groups that made this possible

More than thirty organizations contributed to the NextGen Illinois project. They hosted caucuses for young adult attendees, provided research help on the ten issue areas included in the project, trained young people in advocacy skills, and registered Millennials to vote in record numbers.

The NextGen Illinois policy agenda is a result of their hard work and the hard work of the individuals who contributed their time and talent to make this project possible.

Many of these organizations are already leading the way in advocacy efforts meant to reform Illinois. The NextGen Illinois policy agenda adds support from young people from across Illinois to their efforts.





Education panel speakers at NextGen Illinois Convention | credit: Street-Level youth media

Austin Coalition for Youth Justice hosts a caucus on Civil Rights | credit: Street-Level youth media



Core partners Chicago Votes, Common Cause and LSNA discuss Fair Elections at the NextGen Illinois Convention | credit: Street-Level youth media

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# 1. EDUCATION

Education is a primary concern for Millennials in Illinois. We heard from young people across the state that education access, affordability, and innovative learning techniques were the most important issues for our state legislature to address. We received over 65 policy ideas for improving education in Illinois, and at the nearly 70 caucuses hosted, education was a top issue for students over 60 percent of the time.

## Winning Idea:

Provide equitable public school funding by reforming or rethinking reliance on local property taxes.

## Top Education Ideas:

- Provide equitable public school funding by reforming or rethinking reliance on local property tax distribution.
- Limit the number of students allowed in a K-12 classroom.
- Increase funding for state universities, need-based grants, and scholarships, along with financial and career counseling services.
- Provide all children with access to pre-kindergarten.
- Provide counseling and conflict resolution programs in public schools.

Illinois has one of the largest funding gaps between its wealthiest and poorest public schools in the country.<sup>1</sup> The state received an F in fairness on the “Is School Funding Fair?” report card released by Rutgers researchers and the Education Law Center.<sup>2</sup> Per pupil spending ranges from over \$25,000 at the wealthiest schools<sup>3</sup> to just \$6,000 at the poorest.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, spending has concrete, tangible effects on quality of education including teacher qualifications and student standardized test performance levels.<sup>5</sup> African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be enrolled in low-spending districts than their white peers: for every dollar spent on a white student in Illinois, 93 cents are spent on an African American student and 91 cents on a Hispanic student.<sup>6</sup>

The key problem is that Illinois currently ranks dead last in the country in percentage of school funding provided by the state.<sup>7</sup> Each year, the Illinois General Assembly sets a minimum amount of funding per student that should be available at all schools, referred to as the “foundation level.”<sup>8</sup> The foundation level is consistently set far below the amount recommended by the non-partisan Education Funding Advisory Board, which makes its calculations based on the actual costs of providing an adequate education.<sup>9</sup> Once the foundation level is set, the Illinois State Board of Education then divides districts depending on their ability to afford the foundation level.<sup>10</sup> Most districts fall into the “foundation formula” category, defined as programs that are able to cover no more than 93 percent of the foundation level of funding.<sup>11</sup> The state is then responsible for making up the difference between what local revenue sources are able to cover and the foundation level in these districts. Seventy-seven percent of Illinois students attend schools in foundation formula districts.<sup>12</sup>

NextGen participants felt strongly that Illinois needs to reform our model of public education funding. One way this could be done is to overhaul how the state structures school funding distribution, and advocates have suggested a range of ways that funding distribution could be altered. The School Funding Reform Act of 2014 (Senate Bill 16) represents one possible method of overhaul. The legislation would remodel school funding to provide a single formula that would consolidate funding from across the state. 95 percent of funds would go through one stream that would then be distributed to equalize funding, accounting for district wealth.<sup>13</sup> The measure would also require greater transparency about how funds are spent at a school level.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.HEALTH

The Affordable Care Act has changed health care significantly since the insurance marketplace launched in 2013, but many still have questions about insurance coverage for young people and about the significant health concerns facing Millennials today. NextGen Illinois participants expressed their concern about mental health care in our state, sexually transmitted diseases, and a growing obesity epidemic. The policy solutions they proposed encouraged collaboration between state agencies, schools, and youth representatives to address these concerns head on.

### Winning Idea:

Fund a trauma center to serve gun violence victims on the South and West sides of Chicago.

### Top Health Ideas:

- Mandate that schools discretely provide condoms to students.
- Increase subsidies for businesses that provide fresh produce in neighborhoods without access to fresh foods.
- Create a youth advisory board for the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- Provide training for public school teachers and staff on signs and symptoms of youth mental illness.
- Fund a trauma center to serve gun violence victims on the South and West sides of Chicago.

Trauma is the leading cause of death for people under the age of 45,<sup>15</sup> yet for many South Side residents in Chicago it takes more than 30 minutes to get to a trauma center by ambulance.<sup>16</sup> Cook County has nine level-one trauma centers, eight of which are either North or West of downtown. Although Chicago once had two level-one trauma centers located on the South Side, both have closed.<sup>17</sup> Of the 11,744 gunshot patients treated in Chicago between 1999 and 2009, 4,782 victims were shot more than five miles from a trauma center.<sup>18</sup> These victims were disproportionately likely to be African American and were more likely to be uninsured.<sup>19</sup> The mortality rate for African American gun violence victims shot within five miles of a trauma center is 6.42 percent, but that figure spikes to an 8.73 percent mortality rate for victims shot more than five miles from a trauma center.<sup>20</sup>

These disparities are particularly frustrating because Illinois has a history of leadership in trauma care. In 1971, Illinois launched the nation's first statewide trauma system.<sup>21</sup> Currently 42 states have statewide trauma systems, and 24 of those systems are at least partially funded by the state.<sup>22</sup> Illinois has a Trauma Center Fund in the State Treasury designed to distribute funding to hospitals that are designated as trauma centers.<sup>23</sup> Distribution depends on the number of trauma cases and on the average length of stay in each of those cases.<sup>24</sup> However, trauma centers are costly – by one estimate, University of Chicago Hospital lost \$3,000 per trauma victim treated.<sup>25</sup>

Funding a trauma center is expensive, but NextGen participants voted to make it a financial priority nonetheless. States that provide higher funding to trauma systems use a range of methods to increase available funds, including additional fines on moving violations, fees on motor vehicle registrations, and taxes on cigarette sales.<sup>26</sup> State legislators should also work to push for a federal increase in funding for the creation of a South Side trauma center. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) authorized \$224 million in federal funding for trauma and emergency service programs, including authorization of \$24 million to support state development of trauma systems, and two \$100 million grant programs, Trauma Care Center Grants and Trauma Service Availability Grants.<sup>27</sup> However, lawmakers have not yet appropriated these funds.<sup>28</sup> Efforts to gain additional federal funding would be a tremendous help bringing a trauma center back to the South Side and in helping to provide urgent treatment for gun violence victims.



## 3.CIVIL

## RIGHTS

Civil rights was one of the most powerful topics NextGen participants took on, especially in light of this year's events in Ferguson, MO. Young people in Illinois recognized that problems of inequality exist throughout the state of Illinois and offered several suggestions to combat discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation. They proposed solutions to address gentrification, housing discrimination, disparities in prison sentencing, and language barriers that affect millions in Illinois each year.

### Winning Idea:

Prohibit the imprisonment of first-time non-violent offenders and decrease the sentences of past marijuana offenders.

### Top Civil Rights Ideas:

- Require police to attend more school and community events and to complete crisis intervention training.
- Create an easier, more accessible system for reporting police abuse.
- Encourage schools to respond to disciplinary issues with restorative techniques like peer juries.
- Prohibit the imprisonment of first-time non-violent offenders and decrease the sentences of past marijuana offenders.
- Require stricter background checks for individuals buying guns.

Illinois has incarcerated over 4,000 new prisoners at a time when most states have decreased incarceration rates.<sup>29</sup> In 2010, the state reported a 7.3 percent increase in the number of individuals incarcerated, the second highest in the nation.<sup>30</sup> Illinois also ranks second in exceeding our maximum prison capacity.<sup>31</sup> Non-violent offenders represent 70 percent of the 49,000 individuals who are currently incarcerated in the state.<sup>32</sup> As of 2012, 7,284 of these individuals were convicted on drug offenses.<sup>33</sup> Incarceration is expensive: Illinois spends an estimated \$157,334,400 on incarcerating drug offenders<sup>34</sup> and one year of incarceration costs an average of \$22,000 per inmate.<sup>35</sup> African American and Hispanic individuals are notoriously incarcerated at drastically higher levels than their white peers. Illinois ranks first in the nation with respect to Black-white disparities in incarceration rates for drug crimes.<sup>36</sup>

The state has taken several notable steps recently to reform criminal justice for first-time and non-violent offenders. In 2012, Governor Quinn signed a bill, SB 2621, that allows non-violent prisoners to earn time off their sentences for good behavior.<sup>37</sup> Illinois also passed the Crime Reduction Act of 2009, which implemented a program called Adult Redeploy Illinois (ARI), designed to work directly with different counties to bring non-violent offenders to community-based programs.<sup>38</sup> At a regional level, Cook County runs the State's Attorney's Deferred Prosecution Program, aimed at diverting felony defendants into drug education, job training, or other rehabilitative programs.<sup>39</sup> In 2012, Chicago decreased penalties for marijuana possession, giving police officers the discretion to give tickets for between \$250 and \$500 for low-level possession.<sup>40</sup>

Despite these positive steps, NextGen attendees believe that the state still has a long way to go. Kentucky provides one potential route for reform. The state recently implemented the Public Safety and Offender Accountability Act (HB 463), under which first time small-scale drug offenders are presumptively put on probation unless the judge has special reason to believe the offender should be incarcerated.<sup>41</sup> Another option is to expand Adult Redeploy Illinois. Currently ARI is in operation in 34 counties and has diverted 1,376 non-violent offenders from prison.<sup>42</sup> Expanding the program statewide has the potential to reach thousands more non-violent offenders and to save \$17,100 per individual diverted from incarceration.<sup>43</sup>

## 4.EMPLOYMENT

Illinois has one of the highest teen unemployment rates in the country.<sup>44</sup> Given that unemployment is particularly high for young people in our state, young adults in Illinois were eager to tackle policies that create living wage jobs and a workforce ready to take them on. We held caucuses focused on these statewide issues in Carbondale, East St. Louis, Springfield, and Chicago.

### Winning Idea:

Raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation.

### Top Employment Ideas:

- Teach high school students career prep skills, like resume writing.
- Raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation.
- Fund more workforce trainings for low income and immigrant communities.
- Mandate that part-time employees receive more benefits like paid sick and maternity leave.
- Offer companies tax incentives to pay a living wage and provide opportunities to low income communities.

Although Illinois' current minimum wage of \$8.25 an hour is a dollar higher than the national minimum, it remains challenging for Illinois families to survive on minimum wage earnings.<sup>45</sup> On average, families of minimum wage earners rely on those workers for nearly half (45.9 percent) of their family income.<sup>46</sup> More than a quarter of the families of minimum wage earners have no other source of income.<sup>47</sup> Minimum wage earners are disproportionately women, people of color, and young people. Women currently make up 46.8 percent of the American workforce but represent 58.1 percent of those who earn less than \$10 an hour.<sup>48</sup> African American workers are 10.73 percent of the workforce but 14.31 percent of low-wage earners.<sup>49</sup> Latinos make up 13.83 percent of the workforce but 22.73 percent of low-wage workers.<sup>50</sup> Finally, young people aged 16-24 are 13.25 percent of the workforce but make up 39.54 percent of low-wage earners.<sup>51</sup>

The current minimum wage was set in 2010 as part of a four-step minimum wage increase plan put in place in 2006. Illinois considered an increase to \$10.65 an hour during the 2011 legislative session. The bill, SB 1565, would have affected more than a million workers in Illinois, creating \$3.8 billion in increased wages for directly affected workers.<sup>52</sup> The bill ultimately failed,<sup>53</sup> despite the fact that minimum wage increases in Illinois have overwhelming popular support. In November of 2014, Illinois voters were given a non-binding ballot referendum that asked "[s]hall the minimum wage in Illinois for adults over the age of 18 be raised to \$10 per hour by January 1, 2015?" A majority of voters, 66.5 percent, said yes.<sup>54</sup> In Chicago earlier this year, over 85 percent of voters agreed when asked whether the minimum wage should be increased to \$15 an hour for companies earning over \$50 million.<sup>55</sup> In response, the City Council recently voted to increase the city's minimum wage gradually to \$13 an hour by 2019 and to index the increase to inflation.<sup>56</sup> The increase will affect over 400,000 workers in Chicago.<sup>57</sup>

Stakeholders are considering minimum wage increases at the municipal, state, and federal levels. But NextGen attendees believe that an increase alone is not enough. Attendees voted that adjusting for inflation is urgent – when inflation is accounted for, the minimum wage nationally peaked in 1968 at what would be the equivalent of \$8.56 today.<sup>58</sup> Minimum wage increases also benefit from being paired with other economic boosts such as an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit. Additionally, workforce training programs and registered apprenticeships can help ensure that along with a wage increase, employment rates stay high, and young adults are well prepared for the workforce.



## 5. ENVIRONMENT

Environmental concerns in Illinois are already an important topic for our partners Illinois PIRG and the IIRON Student Network. These groups helped lead the way in discussing key environmental reforms with young adults across Illinois. NextGen participants considered policies to protect Illinois' air, water, and environment to ensure Illinois emerges as a clean energy leader in the Midwest and the nation.

### Winning Idea:

Create new tax incentives for companies to increase energy efficiency and to create or use renewable energy.

### Top Environment Ideas:

- Create new tax incentives for companies to increase energy efficiency and create or use renewable energy.
- Create tax incentives for composting and recycling.
- Make a list of best practices for humane and sustainable farming and subsidize farms that comply.
- Require companies to disclose all chemicals used in fracking.
- Let local communities weigh in on development proposals with large environmental impacts.

Five percent of Illinois' energy comes from renewable resources.<sup>59</sup> Although the state has enacted the Illinois Power Agency Act, which requires energy companies to purchase 25 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2025, current projections show that Illinois is not on track.<sup>60</sup> According to a projection from the Environmental Law and Policy Center, by 2017 the state will only have reached 7 percent renewable energy, rather than the 13 percent mandated by the Power Agency Act.<sup>61</sup> Increasing clean energy use has the additional benefit of creating jobs. More than 300 companies currently participate in the wind, solar, and geothermal supply chain in Illinois.<sup>62</sup> The renewable energy sector in the state creates an estimated 18,000 jobs for residents.<sup>63</sup> Each additional megawatt of solar or wind power translates to roughly 15 to 20 new manufacturing jobs.<sup>64</sup>

Illinois has made substantial progress in attracting providers of renewable energy to the state. The state ranks fourth in the nation in wind energy production,<sup>65</sup> and Chicago, true to its Windy City nickname, is home to more than 50 wind energy companies.<sup>66</sup> Illinois runs a number of tax incentive programs designed to bring clean energy providers to the region. For instance, the state currently provides a sales tax exemption for "high impact businesses" purchasing materials to build wind equipment.<sup>67</sup> Illinois also provides increased tax security for wind farms by keeping property taxes consistent across the state.<sup>68</sup> The Illinois Finance Authority has the power to provide tax-exempt bonds and credit enhancements for renewable energy projects that provide clear public benefits for Illinois residents.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the Solar and Wind Energy Rebate Program encourages both businesses and homeowners to use small-scale solar and wind energy systems.<sup>70</sup>

NextGen attendees support the idea that Illinois needs additional measures to get back on track to the 25 percent by 2025 goal. The key problem is that although Illinois has a fund of more than \$140 million established to help the state meet this goal, the Illinois Power Agency does not have the statutory power to spend the funds.<sup>71</sup> Several proposals have been made for ways in which this could be fixed. One such proposal is SB 103. The bill would amend the Illinois Power Agency Act to make sure that renewable energy credits are given out in a way that meets renewable energy resource power standards.<sup>72</sup> Measures like that could help ensure that Illinois provides the financial resources needed to stay on pace to meet the 25 percent by 2025 goal.

## 6. JUDICIAL

## REFORM

Few voters, regardless of age, know much about how our judicial system works, and many voters underestimate the substantial impact judges have on thousands of lives each year.<sup>73</sup> NextGen Illinois worked to bring this topic into the light, inviting hundreds of young people to learn more about how judges are elected, what powers they have, and how Illinois' court system influences our lives. Participants compared Illinois' judicial election systems to those of other states and suggested reforms aimed at keeping our courts fair and impartial.

### Winning Idea:

Limit the caseloads of public defenders, allowing them more time to focus on each case.

### Top Judicial Reform Ideas:

- Make sure every defendant has access to an interpreter if they need one.
- Teach high school students how the Illinois judicial system functions, with a special focus on how judges are elected.
- Limit the caseloads of public defenders, allowing them more time to focus on each case.

Illinois ranks low on per capita spending on public defense, and this has troubling consequences across the state.<sup>74</sup> For example, public defenders in Cook County face some of the largest caseloads in the country.<sup>75</sup> The average public defender in the county is tasked with handling 160 percent more cases than the national recommendation for public defender caseloads.<sup>76</sup> However, this is also representative of a broader national problem. Currently national standards limit felony caseloads to 150 cases a year per attorney, but caseloads of 500 or 600 a year remain relatively common.<sup>77</sup> The overwhelming majority of felony defendants are represented by public defenders. In Cook County, for instance, four out of five felony defendants rely on the public defense system.<sup>78</sup> These figures are deeply troubling because there is a direct relationship between the amount of time spent representing a client and the likelihood that the client will be wrongfully convicted.<sup>79</sup>

The right to a public defender was established nationally in 1963 in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which found that a defendant charged with a felony offense was entitled to legal representation at the expense of the state.<sup>80</sup> This was later expanded through a series of subsequent Supreme Court cases to cover delinquency proceedings in juvenile courts as well as misdemeanor cases that result in loss of a defendant's liberty.<sup>81</sup> Illinois runs a county-based program, in which each county with 35,000 residents or more is responsible for running their own public defender office.<sup>82</sup> When cases are appealed, the State Appellate Defender Office is tasked with providing representation to defendants who need a court-appointed attorney.<sup>83</sup> 80 percent of public defense funding in Illinois comes from individual counties, and 20 percent comes from the state.<sup>84</sup>

An attorney, no matter how experienced, can only handle so many cases at once. NextGen participants believe that Illinois needs to increase resources devoted to public defender programs in order to provide defendants in the state with the representation they deserve. The Illinois Public Defender Association has been working in recent years to establish statewide caseload standards.<sup>85</sup> However, the organization has no official state sponsorship, and their standards would serve only as a recommendation.<sup>86</sup> Legislation backing the stance of the IPDA could serve to help ensure that no Illinois resident faces unfair conviction simply because their attorney was overworked.



## 7.LEGISLATIVE REFORM

NextGen Illinois focused on reforms we could make at the state level to the structure or functions of our legislative branch, as well as on potential reforms to the selection process for our state legislators. Young people in Illinois want to ensure that our legislature fairly represents everyone in the state, while also being efficient, accountable and free of corruption. Millennials in Illinois generated several great ideas aimed at tackling the influence of money in politics and de-polarizing elections.

### Winning Idea:

Change the procedure for drawing legislative district boundaries to give everyone fair representation.

### Top Legislative Reform Ideas:

- Pass strict term limits for state legislators.
- Increase transparency and public input in major decisions by requiring town hall events from all state legislators.
- Create a voting ballot that does not list political party, but has short candidate platforms, bios and statements.
- Change the procedure for drawing legislative district boundaries to give everyone fair representation.

Every 10 years, Illinois redraws the boundaries on its legislative districts in order to make sure that legislators across the state represent roughly equal populations, despite changes in where Illinois residents live.<sup>87</sup> Redistricting is a complicated process that has the potential to impact the voting power of different demographics in different ways depending on how lines are drawn. When elected officials are allowed to draw legislative district lines, they frequently divide districts in a way that favors their own party. This process is known as gerrymandering.<sup>88</sup> Techniques like “cracking,” “stacking,” and “packing” are used to dilute the voting power of minority groups and other communities of like-minded citizens when redistricting. “Cracking” is when geographic concentrations of minority voters are split apart into different districts. “Stacking” is when minority populations are grouped in the same district as larger groups of white voters. “Packing” is when minority voters are consolidated into the smallest number of districts possible in order to minimize legislative power.<sup>89</sup>

In Illinois, members of the General Assembly run the legislative redistricting process.<sup>90</sup> If the General Assembly is unable to decide on a new map together, the decision is sent to an eight-member bi-partisan commission.<sup>91</sup> If the commission is unable to make a decision, the Illinois Supreme Court nominates one Republican and one Democrat to become a ninth member, and then literally draws one of the two names out of a stovepipe hat.<sup>92</sup> The ninth member whose name gets drawn out of the hat has tremendous power to determine the new districts. Illinois has had redistricting decisions come down to drawing a name out of a hat a number of times, including as recently as 2001.<sup>93</sup>

NextGen attendees support the idea that Illinois should have an independent commission draw district lines. In 2010, California passed an independent redistricting measure that created a 14-member citizens redistricting commission.<sup>94</sup> California residents are able to apply directly to serve as commission members.<sup>95</sup> In 2011, the commission heard public testimony from across the state and hosted 34 public hearings before drawing district lines.<sup>96</sup> The Yes for Independent Maps Campaign pushed for a measure in 2014 that would have amended the Illinois Constitution to create an 11-member independent redistricting commission.<sup>97</sup> Although an Illinois judge ruled that the measure as worded was not allowed to appear on the ballot, a revised version of the proposed amendment could appear on the ballot in 2016 or 2018.<sup>98</sup>

## 8. EXECUTIVE REFORM

Illinois has a history of corruption that has taken its toll, especially on the executive branch. With two of the last three Governors prosecuted for corruption charges,<sup>99</sup> young people want changes that could shake up this pervasive culture. The Governor manages a \$65 billion budget and making it work for such a diverse state is difficult. Recognizing that, NextGen participants considered ways to make the executive branch more in touch with, and responsive to, the residents of Illinois.

### Winning Idea:

Create stricter rules to decrease the influence of lobbyists, like a waiting period between working for the government and lobbying.

### Top Executive Reform Ideas:

- Institute term limits for governor.
- Hold elections for some positions on state-level boards, like the Illinois State Board of Elections and the Illinois State Board of Education.
- Create stricter rules to decrease the influence of lobbyists, like a waiting period between working in government and lobbying.

The Illinois Executive Branch is plagued by a reputation for corruption, and the influence of lobbyists plays a key role in this reputation. Recently several former high-level executive officers have come under scrutiny for taking positions with companies they contracted to while in office.<sup>100</sup> A recent review of more than 1,600 registered lobbyists in Illinois found that nearly 40 were former high-level state employees or elected officials.<sup>101</sup> Many of these former office-holders who now serve as lobbyists are still addressed by titles like “senator” and “representative.”<sup>102</sup>

Illinois can curb the influence of lobbyists through “revolving door” laws, which restrict the ability to switch jobs between government and industries affected by legislation and regulation. The general purpose of revolving door legislation “is to prevent former government employees from unfairly profiting from or otherwise trading upon contacts, associations and special knowledge that they acquired during their tenure as public servants.”<sup>103</sup> In 2003, the head of the Illinois Gaming Board resigned from office and immediately accepted a position with Harrah’s Casino.<sup>104</sup> This prompted then-Governor Blagojevich to sign an initial reform bill that placed post-employment limits on certain public officials.<sup>105</sup> The current revolving door statute prohibits former state officers and employees from accepting jobs with non-state employers if the state employee made contracting decisions that affected the non-state employer and had a cumulative value of \$25,000 or more.<sup>106</sup> The law also prohibits former officers and state employees from accepting compensation with a non-state employer if the state employee had, in the year before leaving state employment, participated personally and substantially in making regulatory or licensing decisions that applied directly to the non-state employer.<sup>107</sup> The law specifies that the office of the Inspector General is tasked with deciding whether prospective employment relationships are prohibited.<sup>108</sup>

NextGen participants believe that Illinois needs stricter rules to prevent its revolving door. Thirty-two states restrict all recent state employees from serving as lobbyists, but Illinois does not.<sup>109</sup> A former state employee who did not make contracting, regulatory, or licensing decisions could still take a lobbying position immediately after leaving the state government.<sup>110</sup> In other states, like Iowa, for instance, former legislators are not permitted to serve as lobbyists for at least two years after leaving office.<sup>111</sup> Implementing a similar restriction for all state employees in Illinois could help prevent undue corporate influence on political decision-making processes.



## 9.CIVIC

### INNOVATION

With recent technological advances, there are many more ways to interact with our government than just voting and paying taxes. Communication is easier than ever before, and online programs make it possible for constituents to provide their elected officials with information about decisions, both large and small, in a convenient and efficient way. NextGen participants thought about a range of ways to make state government more accessible to Illinois residents, including new online programs and services, regulations for data collection and distribution, and more.

#### Winning Idea:

Integrate civic innovation into the K-12 curriculum by teaching how to use government data to solve community problems.

#### Top Civic Innovation Ideas:

- Modernize government websites to make info about officials, candidates, government services, and issues easier to access.
- Update the state's contracting process for tech services so contracts go to companies that can build the best websites.
- Integrate civic innovation into the K-12 curriculum by teaching how to use government data to solve community problems.
- Make all donations to government employees and departments easily accessible public information.
- Treat the Internet as a utility, with consumer protections similar to utilities like water or heat.

"Civic Innovation" is the use of new technology and methods to improve on existing processes and systems, with the aim of improving the lives of citizens or society more broadly.<sup>112</sup> One key focus of the civic innovation movement is a push for increased access to government data. Access to open data has the potential to change the relationship between citizens and their government dramatically, particularly at a local or state level. The push toward civic innovation is a growing movement nationally: 38 states have open data initiatives in place.<sup>113</sup> Cities across the country are launching new civic innovation programs, including participatory budgeting initiatives and neighborhood-specific social networks that provide tools for residents to reach their municipal government.<sup>114</sup>

Chicago is a national leader on civic innovation. In 2012, Mayor Emanuel issued an Open Data Executive Order, which required that each city department designate an Open Data Coordinator and a Chief Data Officer.<sup>115</sup> The city also helped create the Smart Chicago Collaborative, a civic organization that works to improve lives in Chicago through technology, and aims to create meaningful products that use municipal data in creative new ways.<sup>116</sup> The Smart Chicago Collaborative runs the Civic Summer Program, which engages hundreds of Chicago teenagers in civics and technology, and uses digital tools to create new activism strategies and generate positive civic action.<sup>117</sup> In the summer of 2014, the program ran a Youth Change-Maker Initiative that brought more than a hundred young Chicagoans together to create new digital activism products.<sup>118</sup>

Recently, the Illinois Task Force on Civic Education offered a set of recommendations to revitalize the way Illinois schools handle teaching civics.<sup>119</sup> Recommendations included requiring civic education in high school, requiring a service learning project in middle and high school, and involving students in the election process.<sup>120</sup> As these recommendations are implemented, NextGen participants support integrating components of the civic innovation movement into the curriculum. One possible option would be to require that all high school civic education classes include a scaled down version of the topics covered in the Civic Summer program. Curriculum could, for instance, include a week focused on using open data and emerging technologies in creative new ways. Including an innovation component in civic education curricula will help Illinois continue to stay on the forefront of civic innovation work nationally.

## 10. FAIR

### ELECTIONS

On average, only 24 percent of registered voters ages 18-29 in Illinois vote in midterm elections.<sup>121</sup> Participants in NextGen Illinois focused on our election system in an effort to see what could be holding Illinois residents back from registering or turning out to vote. They discussed registration and voting policy, as well as important campaigning rules that characterize modern elections, and they suggested policies that would make voting easier and more inclusive.

#### Winning Idea:

Require candidates to receive funds only from Illinois residents and limit contribution amounts.

#### Top Fair Elections Ideas:

- Require candidates to receive funds only from Illinois residents and limit contribution amounts.
- Make same-day voter registration easy, universal, and permanent.
- Make Election Day a statewide holiday.
- Increase services designated to help high school seniors register to vote.

In 2014, the Illinois race for governor shattered previous state records for money spent on a political campaign and became the most expensive gubernatorial race in state history.<sup>122</sup> Collectively, candidates Pat Quinn and Bruce Rauner spent almost \$100 million on the race.<sup>123</sup>

On average, the campaigns spent \$24 per vote – two and a half times more than candidates spent across the previous three gubernatorial campaigns.<sup>124</sup> Nationally, Illinois ranks fifth highest in both how much money is contributed overall to political candidates and in how much money is given to candidates by individual donors.<sup>125</sup>

Until 2011, Illinois did not have campaign finance limits for political candidates.<sup>126</sup> At the start of 2011, new restrictions went into place that limited contributions to candidates from individuals, state political parties, political action committees, corporations, and labor unions.<sup>127</sup> Today in Illinois, individual contributions are limited to \$5,300 per candidate from any one individual.<sup>128</sup> One major loophole in Illinois campaign finance law is that in local elections, if a candidate makes contributions to his or her own campaign that exceed \$100,000, contribution limits are lifted for all candidates in that race.<sup>129</sup> In the 2015 Chicago mayoral race, campaign limits have been lifted due to one candidate putting more than \$100,000 of his own money toward his campaign.<sup>130</sup>

Illinois does not currently place additional campaign finance restrictions on donations from non-residents. Several other states, however, do have restrictions on non-resident contributions in place. In Alaska, for instance, candidates are limited to fixed amounts in aggregate from non-resident individuals, and non-resident groups are not permitted to make contributions.<sup>131</sup> NextGen participants supported limiting contributions from non-residents in order to help put the focus of Illinois elections squarely on Illinois voters. Participants also voted to limit maximum contribution amounts overall. One way Illinois could do this is to implement a small donor match program similar to those seen in New York and Los Angeles.<sup>132</sup> Under one proposed model, small donations up to \$175 would be met with a 6:1 match, which would turn a \$10 contribution into a \$70 contribution.<sup>133</sup> Similar programs in other states have been often been funded through voluntary donations run through check-off boxes on tax form, although a wide range of additional funding streams have also successfully been used.<sup>134</sup> The aim of these efforts is to increase the role that constituents who cannot afford to make large donations play in shaping individual political races in Illinois.



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HOW CAN

YOU HELP

If you are:

a young  
person:

Be a part of the NextGen team! The many great organizations involved in NextGen offer countless opportunities for you to help us make this agenda happen by signing petitions, volunteering your time, casting your vote, and reaching out to local leaders. We need you!

a foundation  
or charitable  
organization:

Join us! The fun is just beginning. We want to grow this community of engaged and informed youth, and show our local leaders that young people in Illinois are powerful when we work together.

to contact the groups involved,  
see active petitions, and find out  
how you can help reform Illinois.

## an elected official:

We hope you'll take the time to sit down with a group of NextGen Illinois participants to talk about how we can work together to move forward some of these issues. Several, such as our desire for a higher minimum wage in our state and redistricting reforms, are policies already being considered at the state and local level. Talk to us and to the NextGen Illinois core partner groups about why these issues matter.

## community or campus organization:

Help us make change on the issues that matter most to you. Reach out to us about how your group can become a partner on this project, and work with us to achieve these 10 goals, expanding your network and resources.

