



Application by Rise Education Fund

This is the application submitted by Rise, in partnership with BallotReady and Black Youth Vote!, to the Stronger Democracy Award competition (Strongerdemocracyaward.org). To seek input from our community, we have decided to make most of our application public. Certain sections of the application have been redacted to protect personnel or sensitive information. Otherwise, the project team welcomes your input and feedback as we revise our prospectus ahead of the March 30th deadline! To learn more about our vision, visit EverydayActivist.io



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Note: "Youth United Project" has been renamed "Everyday Activist"

Executive Summary (150 words)

Write a one-paragraph overview of your project that answers the following three questions:

- What is a brief description of the problem that you are trying to solve?
- How will you solve it?
- What are your intended outcomes? How will your solution address the lives of the people you wish to serve, including historically marginalized people within that population?

Your Executive Summary should be a stand-alone statement of the problem and solution. It should not require any other context to clearly explain what you are seeking to accomplish.

Youth voter participation increased by 11 percentage points between the 2016 and 2020 elections. Still approximately half of eligible youth did not vote, largely because of structural barriers such as inconsistent civics education, less dedicated outreach from campaigns and organizations, and voter suppression targeting youth. To address these barriers to democratic participation, Rise, BallotReady and Black Youth Vote are launching the Youth United Project (YUP). YUP builds on the successful model of peer-led youth civic education and mobilization that YUP partners pioneered in 2020. Young organizers had multiple, personal conversations with friends and peers using a comprehensive voting information center created by BallotReady. The 50,000 youth who made plans to vote this way voted at rates 27 percentage points higher than youth overall. YUP will scale up this approach by improving civic education technology and investing in youth-led organizations' capacity to mobilize 7 million young voters by November of 2024.



Team Collaboration

Does your team consist of two or more organizations with an executed memorandum of understanding (MOU) (signed and dated by all parties, including the lead organization submitting this proposal)?

- Team consists of two or more organizations but there is not an executed (signed and dated) MOU
- Team consists of two or more organizations and has an executed (signed and dated) MOU
- Team does not consist of two or more organizations

Partners

If your team consists of two or more organizations, please list them using the legal name of each partner. If your team does not consist of two or more partners, please enter "Not Applicable."

Key Partner #1: **Rise Education Fund**

Key Partner #2: **BallotReady**

Key Partner #3: **Black Youth Vote! (National Coalition on Black Civic Participation)**

Key Partner #4: **Not applicable**

Key Partner #5: **Not applicable**

Why Your Team (250 words)

Describe your team's leadership, its members, and its collaborators or partners. If relevant, include details about how and why the collaboration was formed. Explain how your team is uniquely positioned to deliver results, and why you are the best choice to solve this problem. Emphasize that you have the right capabilities, experience, commitment, and authority to adopt the proposed solution and execute your project. We encourage collaboration, coalitions, and partnerships that can together present a credible and actionable reform path to strengthen US democracy. Lead applicants who are 501(c)(4) organizations are required to include, as part of the project team, a 501(c)(3) organization that is eligible to receive funds from a Donor Advised Fund (DAF).

YUP builds on existing partnerships. In 2019, Rise commissioned BallotReady to create a custom election center for youth-led relational organizing. Black Youth Vote and Rise worked together to promote this online election center in 2020 and 2021, but also to co-lead "on the ground" organizing efforts. YUP's network of organizers will rapidly scale up this approach and provide real-time feedback to optimize civic education technology development.

Rise is a youth-led nonprofit focused on college affordability and democracy. In 2020, Rise hired over 1,200 students and youth, approximately two thirds of whom were young people of color. Rise programs are led by accomplished activists such as (redacted), the youngest woman and person of color to run for office in Georgia History.

For 25 years, the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation's Black Youth Vote! (BYV) has successfully trained a new generation of civic leaders and political activists. Black Youth Vote has active affiliates nationwide including in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida, District of Columbia, and Maryland.

BallotReady provides democracy's data, making it easy for voters and constituents to take action at every level of government. BallotReady help voters research their ballot, make a plan to vote, run for office, and hold elected officials accountable down to the very local level. In addition to Rise, in 2020, BallotReady worked with brands like Snapchat, Spotify, and Tiktok as well as organizations like the Alliance for Youth Action and Voto Latino to help 35 million voters turn out and vote informed.

Challenge Statement (250 words)

Describe the specific challenges that your solution will address, using non-expert language. Focus on setting the stage for your solution (versus describing how you intend to solve it) and discuss who is impacted by the problem and why the problem exists.

- Who is impacted by the problem or challenges identified?
- Why does the problem exist in the current environment?
- What are the most influential ways to affect the necessary change, and where are the leverage points where the smallest change can have the biggest impact?

There is a structural deficit in support for youth civics education and participation. The contributing factors include: schools cutting civics education in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, lack of investments in youth outreach from campaigns and organizations, and persistent stereotypes about youth apathy. Although the majority of youth in the United States self-identify as being politically progressive, most existing youth organizing resources are dedicated to right-wing organizations. According to a 2017 Century Foundation report, progressive youth organizations have approximately 60% of the staff capacity as conservative student organizations even in the best funding environments.

The lack of resources for civic education and outreach hurts all youth, but especially youth of color. According to CIRACLE, lack of information is the number one reason cited by youth who were registered, but did not vote in the 2020 elections. A similar survey found that over 40 percent of Black youth had never seen information about voting by mail, and would not know how to find it if their state shifted to all-mail voting. While these statistics are troubling, the data also suggests a path forward. Over 65% of 18-19 year olds received information about the 2020 elections from family, friends, or roommates—more than twice as many who received information from cable TV (27%), radio (26%) or print news (13%). By tapping into networks of friends and family, and using innovative technologies to reach them with comprehensive information about voting, YUP will close the gaps in education and outreach for millions of youth.

E. YOUR SOLUTION

This section provides the opportunity for you to more fully explain how you intend to solve the challenge you have outlined above. **This section will be viewed by peers and judges of the competition.**

Solution Overview (250 words)

We are seeking solutions that drive structural reforms to help our government fully and competently represent its citizens. Strong solutions will address systemic barriers and advance structural reforms in policymaking, voting and elections, and/or civic engagement with the objective of incenting the government to be more responsive to the broader electorate and ensure government is staffed with high quality/high functioning institutions and people. Describe what your solution is or does, how it meaningfully contributes to solving the problem, and the short and long-term impact that your solution will have.

- Describe who will benefit from your intervention and the benefits or outcomes of your intervention.
- How does your solution meaningfully contribute to resolving the chosen problem?
- How will you know that you are making progress?
- Describe the impact that your solution will have on the chosen problem over an up to five-year grant period. Will it have broad impact on a large population or geography, or will it have deep and intense impact on a small population or geography?

YUP uniquely addresses the gap in education and outreach to youth by fostering sustained, personalized conversations between peers using the voting technology from BallotReady. Other “relational” technologies such as friend-to-friend texting often have low response rates because youth can differentiate between authentic and automated messages, even if those messages are sent by a friend. That is why YUP partners trained organizers to have four or more personalized conversations with peers they canvassed, encouraging them to make a plan to vote in the election center. When organizers successfully canvassed 50 peers, they received stipends. In 2020, this solution produced 50,000 unique plans to vote among youth that were significantly more racially diverse than their state averages.

The Stronger Democracy Award will improve and scale up this solution in three ways. YUP will drive new innovations in the election center that support peer organizing and deepen integrations with social media to support “civic influencers.” Additionally, Rise will hire 10,000 organizers who help refine the model while working to mobilize 2 million young voters in their peer networks by 2024. Lastly, YUP partners will create a consortium of groups using these proven tactics and tools to reach an additional 5 million young voters by 2024. YUP will measure progress by tracking peer conversations, plans to vote, and organizers trained during the grant period. This project will focus resources on young voters of color in urban and rural areas who receive the fewest resources for civic education and participation.



Theory of Change (200 words)

State your project's theory of change and the underlying evidence that supports the results you want to achieve. Emphasize the methodologies that you intend to employ and how they create a causal link to your shorter-term, intermediate, and longer-term goals. As you develop your response, consider these [Theory of Change resources](#).

By providing civic education information to youth through trusted peer messengers at rates that are commensurate with outreach to older generations, youth will vote at rates equal to or greater than older generations. The wages for youth-led peer voter engagement are essential because it makes organizing economically viable for youth, especially from low-income backgrounds (whereas wealthier retirees are better able to volunteer). The premise that youth-led civic organizations receive fewer resources for such efforts is backed by the Century Foundation report previously cited. Political campaigns mirror those findings: According to Syracuse University, President Biden's campaign spent just 8% of their Facebook and Instagram ads campaign targeting 18-24 year olds while the Trump campaign spent closer to 5%.

Furthermore, peer education and relational organizing strategies are both highly effective tactics backed by randomized controlled trials (RCT). A 2020 RCT from Columbia University found a 13 percentage point increase in turnout from relational organizing, "the largest intent-to-treat effect documented by an experimental GOTV study over the last two decades." Peer to peer education frameworks, which overlap in several ways with relational organizing, are backed by rigorous evidence in higher education, public health and other sectors.

Innovation (200 words)

Share how your approach will more efficiently and/or more effectively lead to the intended outcomes for your target beneficiaries, and how it differs from, improves upon, and/or bolsters existing methods/practices. Highlight any unique features and any other information demonstrating creativity and innovation in your approach and proposed solution.

Our innovation addresses the challenge of scaling highly effective, youth-focused relational organizing for civic education and voter turnout. To succeed, true innovations must be easily scalable. This project scales effective practices in three ways: first by recruiting and training a cohort of 10,000 youth to work as relational organizers who are provided stipends by Rise. This would, to our knowledge, be the largest cohort of youth ever trained in the United States to use organizing tactics for civics education. Additionally, Rise will codify and disseminate the core practices of our model among a consortium of youth-led organizations that can replicate them in their own contexts. Through these tandem approaches, YUP will reach 7 million youth through intensive relational organizing by 2024. The third component of our scaling strategy is embedding more tools for young organizers directly into BallotReady's technology that facilitate peer-to-peer conversations and sharing on social media. These embedded tools will help youth track and manage the number of peers they educate, register or help make a plan to vote. The social sharing features will enable youth to serve as "civic influencers" by posting their ballot guides and comprehensive voting plans across all major social media networks.

Priority Populations

Select the priority population(s) as the primary beneficiaries for your solution. You must select at least one priority population, and you are welcome to provide up to three.

Selected:

- Young adults
- Economically disadvantaged people
- People of African descent

Evidence of Effectiveness (250 words)

What evidence do you have or why do you believe the solution you propose will work? Present any internal or formal academic evidence you may have, including any results from complementary or previous work. If necessary, you may cite academic literature or papers. Use brackets and numbers to indicate relevant citations [#], which you can later clarify in a separate Bibliography section. The purpose of providing citations throughout the application is to affirm that any claims have been investigated and/or verified by a credible source or authority.

Using Google Analytics and Rise's website analytics, Rise determined that our relational organizing program canvassed over 200,000 young voters across Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Additionally, youth in dozens of other states visited Rise's election center even without an organizer directing them to utilize it. This effort yielded approximately 50,000 unique plans to vote that included complete contact information and addresses for youth. Rise submitted those plans to vote to data firm Targetsmart that determined which of those youth turned out to vote. Voter file matching is an imprecise science, and especially for youth of color and first time voters whose records are often not represented in voter data because of structural issues and system racism. Despite those challenges, Rise had a relatively high match rate of 60% that showed youth contacted by Rise voted at a rate 27 percentage points higher than the average youth voter turnout in those states. That sky-high increase in voting is despite Targetsmart's model deeming these youth to be "lower propensity" voters than youth overall.

BallotReady has worked with multiple organizations to study our effectiveness. Two noteworthy studies: in 2019, the Analyst Institute found that texting low propensity voters a link to BallotReady voter guides increased turnout by 0.3%, generating net voters at a rate of eight additional voters per \$1,000 spent. Researchers at MIT compared BallotReady's users with voters of similar demographics and voting history. They found that BallotReady users were 20 percentage points more likely to turn out.

Ability to Scale (250 words)

Describe your plan for scaling your solution and its benefits. Scale may mean expanding to new populations or geographies, or it may mean how you intend to amplify your impact more deeply in one geography or population or context. If appropriate, explain whether and how you will need to tailor and adapt your solution for scaling and/or amplifying impact. What is the evidence, or why do you believe your results can be replicated? As you prepare your response, read [MSI's Scaling-Up: Tools & Techniques for Practitioners and Scaling-Up: Management Framework for Practitioners](#).

Between June and November of 2020, Rise hired, trained and awarded stipends to more than 1,100 youth in target states who conducted the vast majority of the youth voter outreach. To reach proposed targets, Rise will scale up to hire and train an average of 2,000 youth every six months between the grant notification and November of 2024. The road to 10,000 youth recruited, hired and trained will have a preliminary phase leading up to 2022, and more substantial recruitment during periods close to major elections. The biggest challenge in scaling YUP's program in 2020 was that Rise did not raise the requisite budget until June of 2020. The Stronger Democracy Award would ameliorate that obstacle by awarding multi-year funding and also spotlighting YUP as a high-impact coalition for democracy. Rise would deploy approximately half of the grant to hire youth who will receive wages, stipends, and scholarships, and reach an average of 200 friends, peers and family members.

YUP will further scale our solution through the improvements to BallotReady's technology that encourage peer sharing, and by convening a consortium of youth-led organizations implementing our relational organizing model. To enable youth-led groups to execute high-impact relational organizing programs, YUP will use rigorous research such as randomized controlled trials to distill the most high-impact elements of our solution. Once those elements have been identified, Rise will provide frequent and freely available training and free access to BallotReady's tools to consortium members.



Timeline and Milestones (250 words)

What is your expected timeline for project completion and what outcomes or milestones will you track to know if you are successful or on track to be successful? You may find these [evaluation resources](#) helpful.

YUP will complete this project by April of 2025 broken down as follow:

April - November, 2022:

- Recruit, hire and train 2,000 youth to mobilize at least 400,000 young voters
- Deploy preliminary relational tools in the election center and more comprehensive social sharing features
- Seek an evaluator to conduct an experimental evaluation that analyzes the highest impact components of the model
- Launch a preliminary cohort of 10 youth-led, relational organizing consortium organizations to mobilize 1 million youth

December 2022-June 2023:

- Recruit 1,000 more youth to educate and prepare 250,000 youth to vote in subsequent elections
- Seek feedback on election center to continue iteration of tools
- Receive evaluation results following certification of election results in early 2023, and begin the refining program for 2024.
- Add 5 consortium members

July 2023 - December 2023:

- Further iterate solution based on evaluation findings
- Deploy a comprehensive relational organizing guide within the consortium and establish regular trainings
- Recruit 1,500 more youth to mobilize an additional 300,000 youth.
- Develop tools that allow ballot information and civic education to be easily integrated into mobile video formats
- Add 5 consortium members

January 2024-June 2024

- Hire 2,500 more youth to mobilize 500,000 young voters
- Use primary elections (if relevant) to refine approach heading into the fall of 2024
- Consortium now totals 30 youth-led organizations

July 2024-November 2024

- Hire 3,000 more youth to reach 600,000 youth
- Conduct a second rigorous evaluation
- Consortium totals 50 organizations that mobilize 4 million youth

Measurement of Results (250 words)

How do you plan to measure the effectiveness of your proposed project? You may find these [evaluation resources](#) helpful.

YUP will collect and analyze data through a continuous improvement framework, and also commission at least two experimental trials during the grant period. These two evaluation strategies will serve separate, but aligned purposes. The first goal of measuring youth recruited, hired, trained and stipended--as well as plans to vote, conversations with youth, and related measures--will ensure that the project is on track to meet its objectives and the program model is improving throughout the grant period. These tactics will also allow Rise and BallotReady to optimize both the human and technological components of this project by identifying best practices for the recruitment, hiring and training of youth organizers as well as for their outreach to peers in communities with fewer resources for civic education.

The experimental studies in this project will provide an independent analysis of the work and contribute to the growth and development of the relational organizing consortium. These studies will help contribute to the overall evidence for relational organizing practices. In the past, BallotReady has partnered with MIT, the Analyst Institute, and the Arnold Foundation to run randomized controlled trials, randomizing treatments and measuring effects by matching users to the voter file. By relying on independent evaluators using rigorous research methods, YUP will have additional validation of the efficacy of the model that can be shared with other adopters as well. These studies will also contribute to the growing field of rigorous research that shows the effectiveness of comprehensive, relational organizing in an electoral setting.

Barrier Assessment and Risk Mitigation (150 words)

How will you ensure your initiative is feasible and will work? Describe any barriers to success of the initiative, as well as any unintended consequences, and your plan to address those barriers. Discuss your experience and capacity to manage technical or logistical barriers.

The biggest challenge will be maintaining fidelity to the core elements of high-impact relational organizing as the model scales during the grant period. YUP will reduce this risk by building high-quality, regular training into every engagement with youth organizers. These trainings are delivered remotely via Zoom and will resume in-person once it is safe to do so. Another way Rise addresses this risk is that youth who do not use the high-impact model are not likely to achieve their goals, and therefore do not receive their stipend. This “pay for performance” model is a significant improvement in the structure of organizing work, which is typically done on an hourly or contract basis. On the technical side, the biggest pitfall is building products users don’t need - in particular assuming technology can replace good organizing. Working with a consortium, YUP will get continual feedback on platforms that truly support voters.

Bibliography (200 words)

If you included citations [#s] in the Evidence of Effectiveness section of your application, provide your bibliography with a corresponding bracketed number [#] for each citation. If you did not insert citations, offer a list of resources that may be used to validate general claims made in your application. Please link to any articles that may be accessed online, even if behind a paywall. We recognize there are many standards for writing a bibliography, and we do not enforce any particular format. It is your responsibility to make those citations easy-to-understand. If not applicable, please insert “Not Applicable.”

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Other Considerations (150 words)

This is your final opportunity to raise any other considerations. Here, you may emphasize or expand upon a previous point or provide new information, as necessary.

What separates YUP from other youth-focused initiatives is a relentless focus on driving new innovation and scaling evidence-based practices to inspire and mobilize young voters. Communication technology used by youth is rapidly evolving and the strategies that are most effective for educating and mobilizing young voters will be different from the previous cycle. That is why YUP’s Stronger Democracy application does not forecast the exact products we plan to implement over the next several years as it is simply too soon to know. However, what does remain constant is that civic education and voting messages from friends, family and trusted peers continue to be more impactful than those from strangers. Leveraging existing networks between young adults to close the gaps in civic education resources using new innovations and the principles for high-impact relational organizing are what allows the YUP coalition to continually deliver better outcomes than projects with similar goals.