

Young People Are the Key to Revitalizing Communities: Eight Ways to Engage Them Now

Quint Studer says the key to building a vibrant community is engaging and enlisting its young people in the revitalization process. Here's how.

PENSACOLA, FL, UNITED STATES, August 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The path to a vibrant community begins with drawing in young people. After all, thriving businesses are the cornerstone of vibrant communities, and they need access to plenty of young talent. (According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force.

Source:

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/opder/DASP/Trendlines/posts/2024_08/Trendlines_August_2024.html) That's one reason communities are pouring so much time and money into creating lively downtowns with great restaurants, funky stores, cool living spaces, and plenty of fun things to do, along with spotlighting education. All citizens care about these issues, of course, but for young people, they are at the top of the priority list.

Yet, these efforts alone aren't enough. Quint Studer—a revitalization expert who is headlining the upcoming Civic Leader Summit in Pensacola, Florida, from September 23rd to September 25th, alongside Strong Towns' Chuck Marohn—says communities seeking to revitalize must deliberately and proactively engage young people early in the planning process.

"Seek out young people, give them projects they can put their arms around, and reward them in meaningful ways," advises Studer, author of *Building a Vibrant Community: How Citizen-Powered Change Is Reshaping America* (Be the Bulb Publishing, ISBN: 978-0-9981311-1-5, \$24.95) and founder of Pensacola, Florida's Studer Community Institute. "You want them deeply invested from the beginning, so they'll help your community thrive long term."

Studer's book tells the story of Pensacola's journey to vibrancy. Years ago, it was struggling in the wake of many years of economic decline. Today, much has changed. Downtown is thriving (and winning awards). New businesses are popping up. Construction is increasing. An important factor in this turnaround was Pensacola's campaign to capture the community's youth and get them involved and invested—so they would choose to stay.

"The good news is it's not that hard to get young people involved," says Studer. "Often, it's just a

matter of asking. They have a vested interest already. They want to live and work in their community. They don't want to watch their friends leave town because there are no jobs."

Keep reading for some tips to keep the youth invested in your community.

Get them excited about the community's possibilities. Ken Ford, who is founder and CEO of the Florida Institute for Human & Machine Cognition (IHMC), brought a lot of young people to Pensacola. He was one of the early drivers for revitalizing the community because he needed to attract world-class talent to the institute. Studer says Ford talked to him about his conversations with young people in making the decision to build IHMC in Pensacola.

"He convinced them they were on the cusp of something great," recalls Studer. "He helped them see that Pensacola was large enough that IHMC could attract the right people, but small enough that they could make a big difference in the community and local economy—something they wouldn't be able to do in a big city. He also got them excited about buying old historic houses and fixing them up. And they ended up becoming committed, deeply engaged residents."

Actively engage them in your plans. Young people may be hesitant to get involved if you don't actively seek them out. Young people can be timid. They don't want to step on toes. They may also worry that they don't have the skill set to do it, or they may not have the initial interest. Studer encourages communities to make sure that the message to the youth is always, "Don't wait for the baton to be handed down to you. Grab the baton and run with it."

Find the influencers and connectors. Grab the influential young citizens right away and get them involved. They will attract others. In Pensacola, this was the Pensacola Young Professionals (PYP). They saw that Studer's Community Maritime Park Initiative had a lot of potential in moving Pensacola forward. The PYP became instrumental in getting the message out and getting people engaged. They did the legwork and connected with a lot of citizens on a personal level. If a similar group does not already exist in your community, it might be a good idea to create one.

Give them meaningful responsibility (and don't micromanage them). Young people need to feel empowered. Give them a project and let them make it their own. Their solutions might be different and nontraditional, but it doesn't mean they're wrong.

"As we were trying to determine what metrics we should focus on to keep the community progressing, the PYP got involved," says Studer. "They took over the Pensacola Quality of Life Survey, which was done by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research. Having them manage this survey was a tremendous win, because it gave them a sense of accomplishment and really gelled them together as a group. It also developed in them a passion for the community. Once they started getting involved in local issues, they became owners, not renters."

Emphasize the business skills they'll be learning. Help them connect the dots that these skills will be valuable in their career. Invite them to educational events where they can learn these skills. In

Pensacola, Studer Community Institute holds workforce development workshops, small business roundtables, and an annual business conference, EntreCon. The PYP also became a training ground that got young people ready for other things.

“People under the age of 30 or so might not be ready to serve on a board or to take on some other major position in the community,” Studer says. “But by working with the PYP, they learned lessons and gained confidence. They became leaders. Many of these individuals are now in leadership positions in the community. A lot of them are running their own businesses. So their experience with PYP set the stage for the future. This success can be duplicated in almost any community.”

Make full use of social media. Reach out to young people via platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Meetup. Young people are most comfortable using social media, so start with these platforms when trying to attract them.

Meet in fun venues. Microbreweries and coffee shops are always good venue options when working with young people. They tend to avoid the traditional conference room-style meetings.

Reward and recognize their efforts often. This could mean anything from sending a thank-you letter to public recognition to a professional reference or recommendation. Positive reinforcement will keep young people coming back and doing their best work.

“Once young people initially get engaged, they start getting engaged on a lot of other levels as well,” concludes Studer. “This really promotes business development, civic engagement, and volunteerism. When you get young people enthusiastic about what happens in the community, it’s truly an investment in the future—one that will pay off in all sorts of ways, both now and later on.”

The Center for Civic Engagement will partner with Strong Towns to host the Civic Leader Summit from Tuesday, September 23, through Thursday, September 25, in Pensacola, Florida. The Summit will bring together community leaders, innovators, and stakeholders committed to building stronger, more resilient communities.

Participants will learn actionable strategies, receive practical tools and tactics, and make valuable connections to enhance their local impact. The agenda will be filled with people who are “in the trenches” doing the work right now and are committed to bringing tried-and-true strategies to help solve communities’ toughest problems. The program will feature breakout sessions and presentations from Quint Studer, Chuck Marohn, and Pensacola Mayor D.C. Reeves, with many more speakers to be announced.

To register, please visit <https://www.civicleadersummit.com/>.

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About Quint Studer:

Quint Studer is an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and leadership expert dedicated to helping organizations and communities thrive. He founded Studer Group, which improved education and healthcare outcomes and earned the Malcolm Baldrige Award before its acquisition in 2015. Studer's focus was also on community revitalization via the Studer Community Institute (SCI), which advances early brain development and leadership training. He also founded the Center for Civic Engagement. The Center brings in speakers to Pensacola on a wide range of topics aimed at educating citizens and raising civic IQ. His efforts helped revitalize Pensacola, Florida, driving significant growth and earning national recognition. He has authored 16 books, including *The Busy Leader's Handbook*, a Wall Street Journal bestseller, and *Building a Vibrant Community*, which is a blueprint for creating great places to live, work, and play. A passionate teacher and mentor, he continues to inspire leaders and communities nationwide.

About the Center for Civic Engagement:

The Center for Civic Engagement is a nonprofit organization with the goal of making Pensacola a better place to live, grow, work, and invest through smart planning and civic conversations. They attract national experts to the CivicCon speaker series that explores what "great" looks like and how others have overcome challenges in their communities.

About the Book:

Building a Vibrant Community: How Citizen-Powered Change Is Reshaping America (Be the Bulb Publishing, ISBN: 978-0-9981311-1-5, \$24.95) is available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

About Chuck Marohn:

Charles ("Chuck") Marohn is the founder and president of Strong Towns. With decades of experience as a land use planner and civil engineer, Marohn is on a mission to help cities and towns become stronger and more prosperous. He has spoken nationally and internationally on how current U.S. development patterns are bankrupting cities and making them more fragile, and what cities can do to become more resilient through local action. His latest book, *Escaping the Housing Trap*, is a national bestseller. In recognition of his efforts and impact, Planetizen named him one of the 15 Most Influential Urbanists of all time in 2017 and 2023.

About Strong Towns:

Strong Towns is a national nonprofit, media organization, and member-powered movement for change that shifts conversations around North American development patterns. Through articles, podcasts, videos, live events, and professional coaching, it provides knowledge and tools to help people take the future of their neighborhoods, towns, and cities into their own hands.

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