



The Roots of Engaged Citizenship:
How Youth Build Character and Civic
Skills

Amy Syvertsen, PhD
Search
INSTITUTE

Laura Wray-Lake, PhD
UNIVERSITY of
ROCHESTER

Aaron Metzger, PhD
West Virginia University



John
Templeton
Foundation

The opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the values of the John Templeton Foundation.

- **Civic Engagement and Character Development**
- **Promoting Civic Values and Behaviors**
- **Resources**



What is civic engagement?



POLL

**What is the very
first thing you think
of when you hear
the term civic**



Civic engagement is comprised of behaviors, values, attitudes, and knowledge related to political and social issues.

Civic engagement is **rooted in** young people's **day-to-day lived experiences**.

Today's Focus: Volunteering
 Environmental Behavior
 Following the News
 Social Responsibility Values

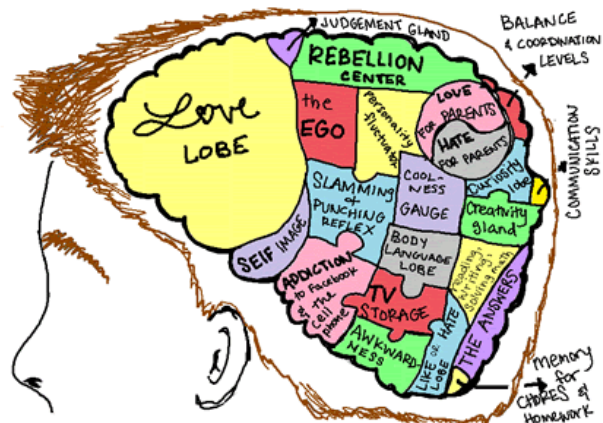


[Amn , 2012; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Youniss et al., 2002]

Why study this in children and adolescents?



THE AVERAGE TEENAGE BRAIN



Why do we care about civic engagement?



- Healthier individuals
- Fewer problem behaviors
- Higher school achievement
- Establish good habits for civic life in later adulthood
- Stronger communities



- **Healthier individuals**
- Fewer problem behaviors
- Higher school achievement
- Establish good habits for civic life in later adulthood
- Stronger communities



- Healthier individuals
- Fewer problem behaviors
- **Higher school achievement**
- Establish good habits for civic life in later adulthood
- Stronger communities



Where do character strengths fit?

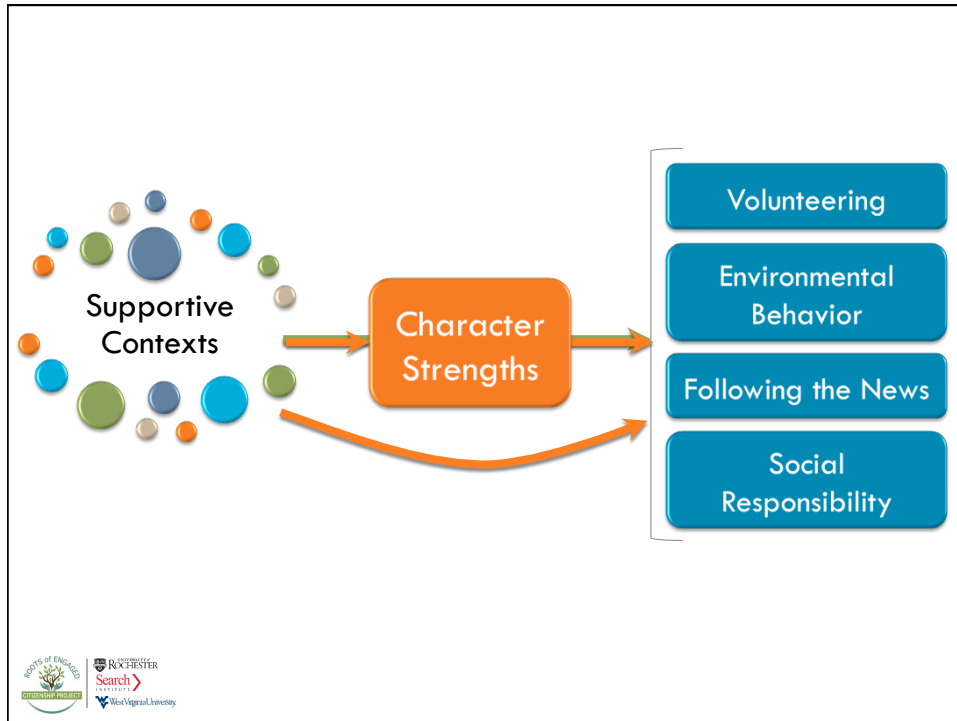


Defining character strengths:

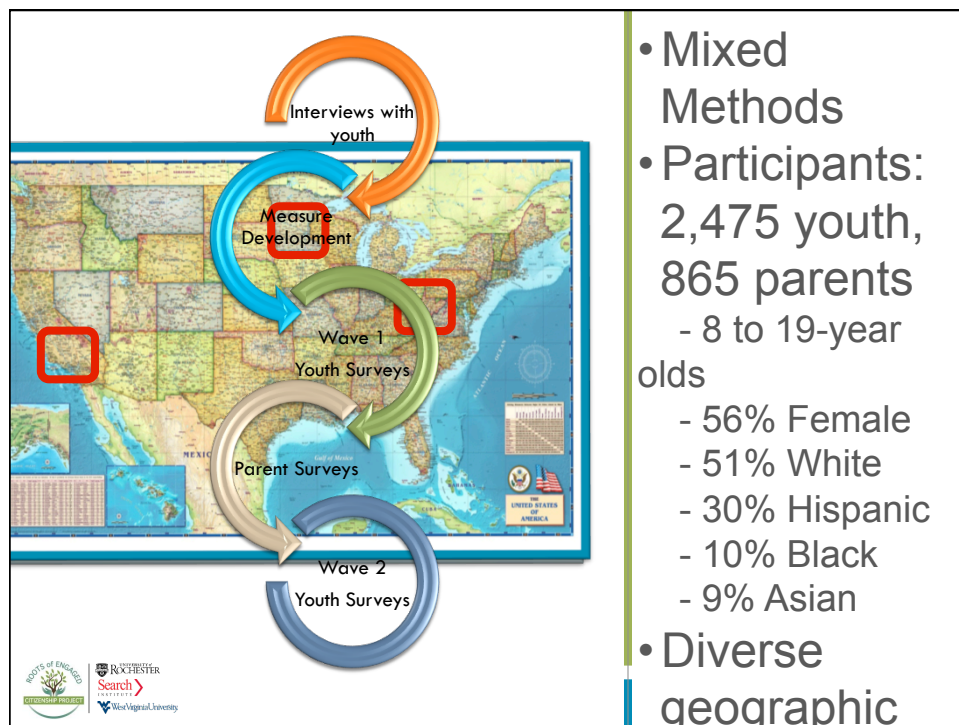
- Positive individual attributes/skills
- Vary across individuals
- Arise through experiences

humility
leadership
future-minded
responsibility
perseverance
gratitude
teamwork
respect





**How do we promote
civic values and
behaviors?**



STRATEGY 1

DISCUSS
Civic Issues

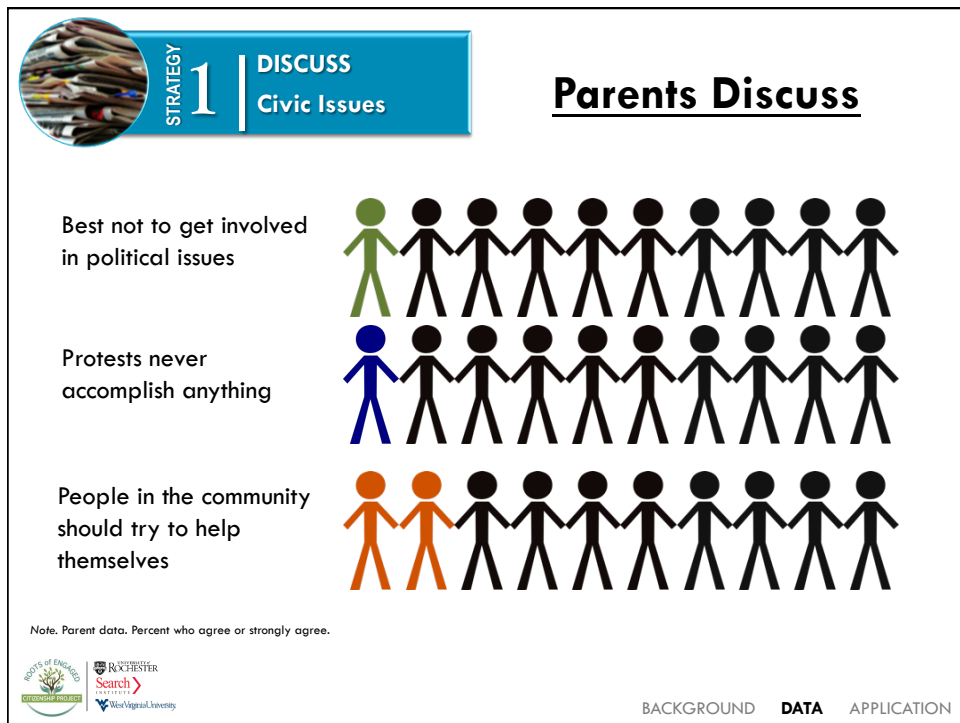
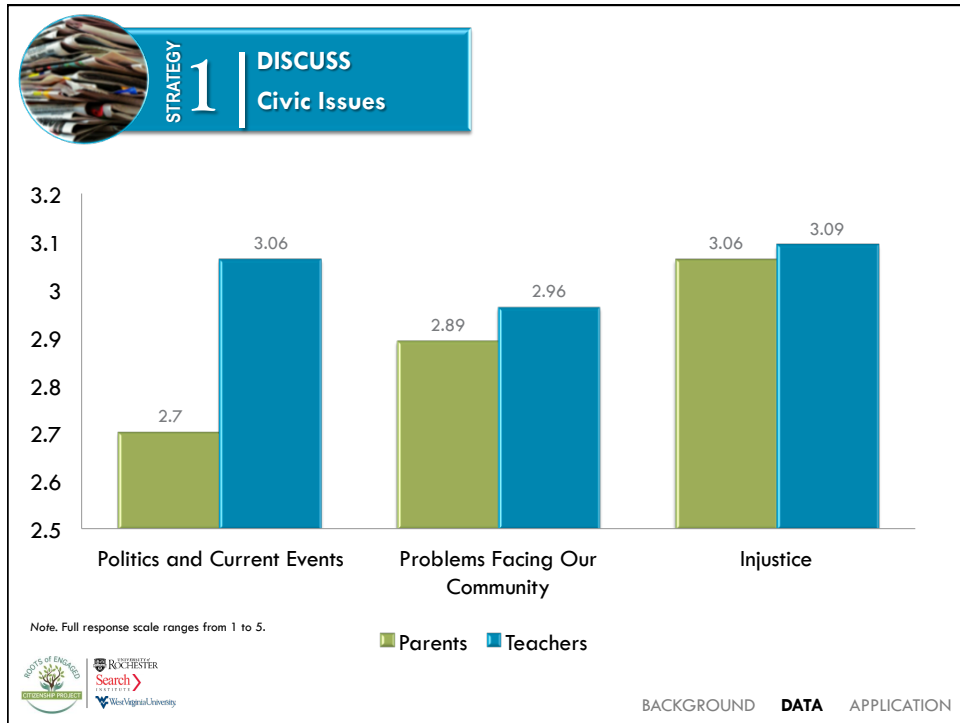
...ment is enhanced when socialization agents such as teachers and parents discuss:

- Current events
- Problems facing their community
- Injustice

BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION

POLL

Who talks to kids more about politics/current events:
parents or teachers ?



STRATEGY
1

DISCUSS
Civic Issues

- Finding the right time
- Choosing the right words
- Being open to youths' opinions

BACKGROUND **DATA** **APPLICATION**

STRATEGY
2


PROVIDE
Opportunities

Youth engagement in
organized activities

```

graph LR
    A[Involved Youth] --> B[Civic Engagement]
    A --> C[Character Development]
  
```

BACKGROUND **DATA** **APPLICATION**



STRATEGY 2 | **PROVIDE Opportunities**




outside of normal school hours, how often are you...

Civic Experiences

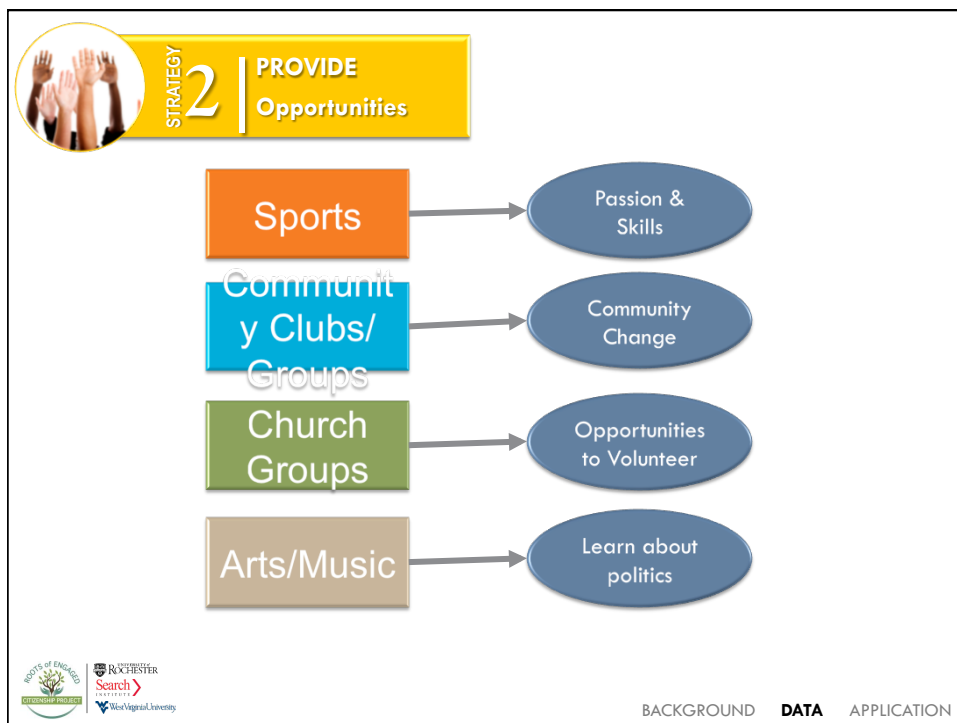
- Making important changes in your community?
- Learning about political or social issues?
- Volunteering to help others?

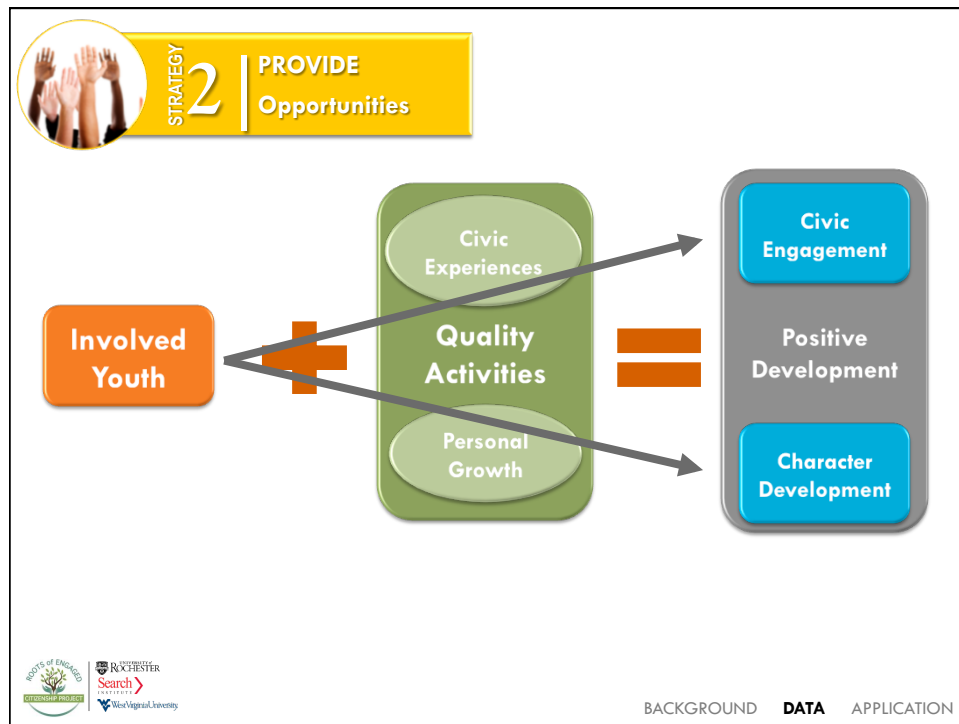
Personal Growth Experiences

- Learning about yourself and what is important to you?
- Learning new skills that are useful outside the activity?
- Doing something that you are passionate about and that gives you joy and energy?

BACKGROUND **DATA** APPLICATION





STRATEGY 2 | PROVIDE Opportunities

- Quality matters
- Inject the quality
- Provide diverse opportunities

A photograph of a smiling man and a young boy, both looking towards the camera. The man is wearing a dark green shirt, and the boy is wearing a green shirt. They are standing in front of a cardboard box filled with colorful clothing items.

ROOTS OF ENGAGEMENT UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER Search UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION

STRATEGY 3

MODEL Civic Behaviors

Modeling is when youth emulate the behaviors that adults are doing.

BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION

STRATEGY 3

MODEL Civic Behaviors

23% Parents volunteer

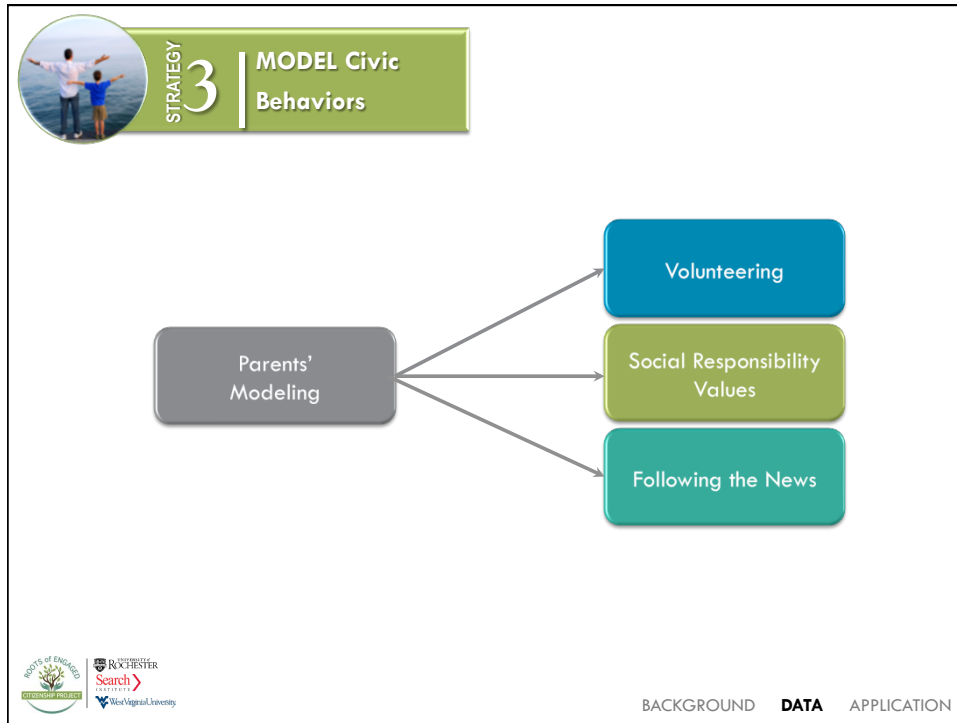
56% Parents vote

31% Parents follow the news

28% Parents actively improve the neighborhood

Photo Credit: [Joseph Voves](#), Flickr

BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION



STRATEGY 3 | MODEL Civic Behaviors

To Effectively Model Civic Behavior:

Volunteer with your child

How to find volunteer opportunities?

- Local organizations
- Pick a project that matters to your family!
- Check out Generation On
- Be spontaneous!

ROOTS OF ENGAGEMENT UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER Search > WILSON VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION

STRATEGY 3

MODEL Civic Behaviors

To Effectively Model Civic Behavior:

Capitalize on the little moments

“My momma, she's helped people at her work....she stood up to her work...her boss was treating them really bad.”

BACKGROUND DATA **APPLICATION**

POLL

Why don't some kids emulate their parents' civic behaviors?


STRATEGY 4 | BUILD Supportive Relationships

- Respect opinions
- Give positive feedback
- Build close connections







BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION


STRATEGY 4 | BUILD Supportive Relationships

Supportive relationships are **NECESSARY** but **INSUFFICIENT** for fostering civic engagement








Photo Credit: [United Way for Greater Austin](#), flickr




BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION


**STRATEGY 4** | BUILD Supportive Relationships

High Support
from **PARENTS and TEACHERS**

LOW across **other three strategies** **=**

LOW levels of Civic Engagement





BACKGROUND **DATA** APPLICATION

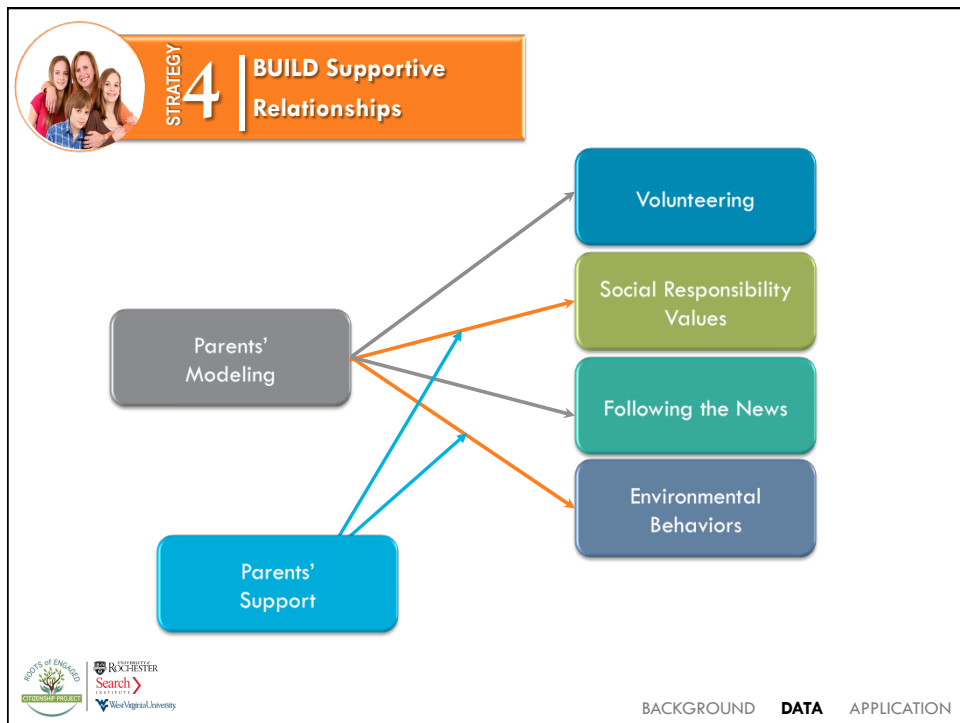
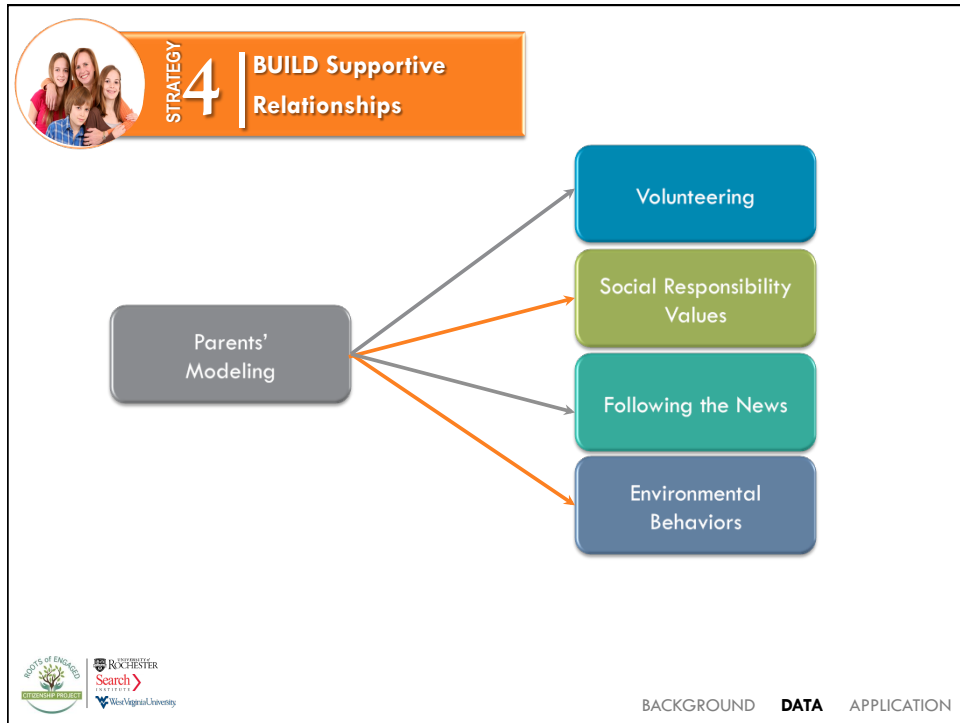
**STRATEGY 4** | BUILD Supportive Relationships

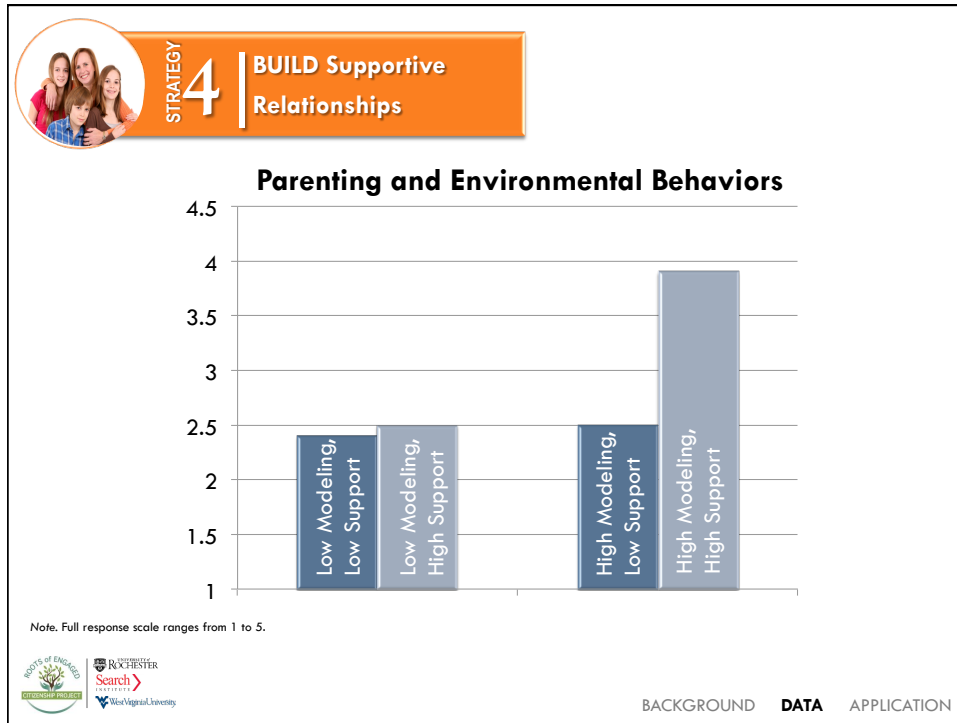
Supportive relationships
enhance the effectiveness of other strategies





BACKGROUND **DATA** APPLICATION





STRATEGY 4 | BUILD Supportive Relationships

- Visit parentfurther.com
- Take the quizzes
- Get personalized feedback and strategies

ROOTS OF ENGAGEMENT | UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER Search | West Virginia University

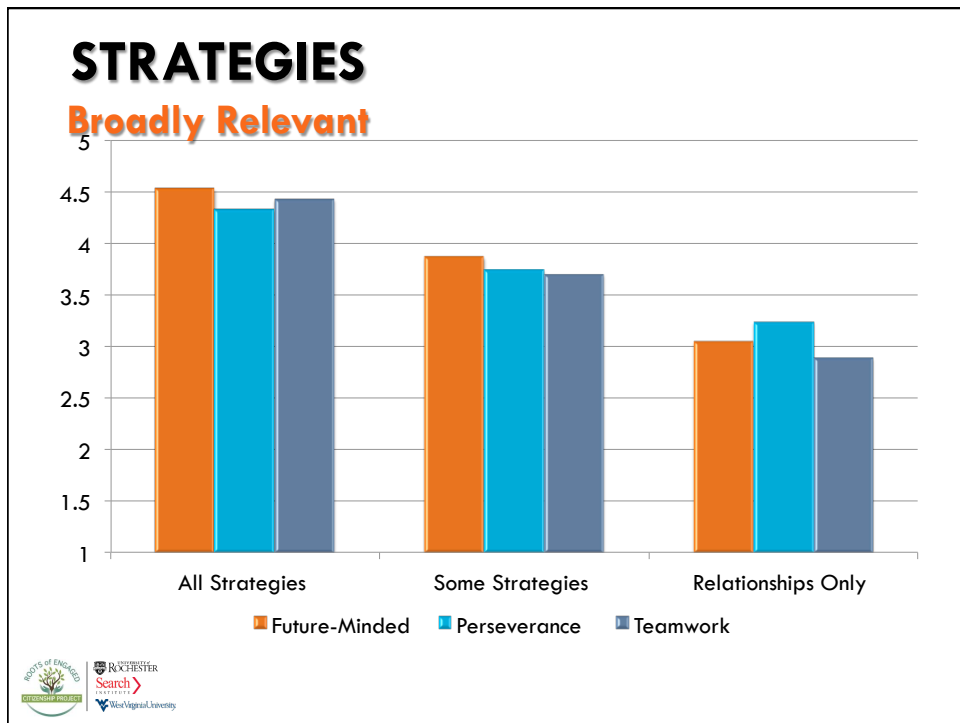
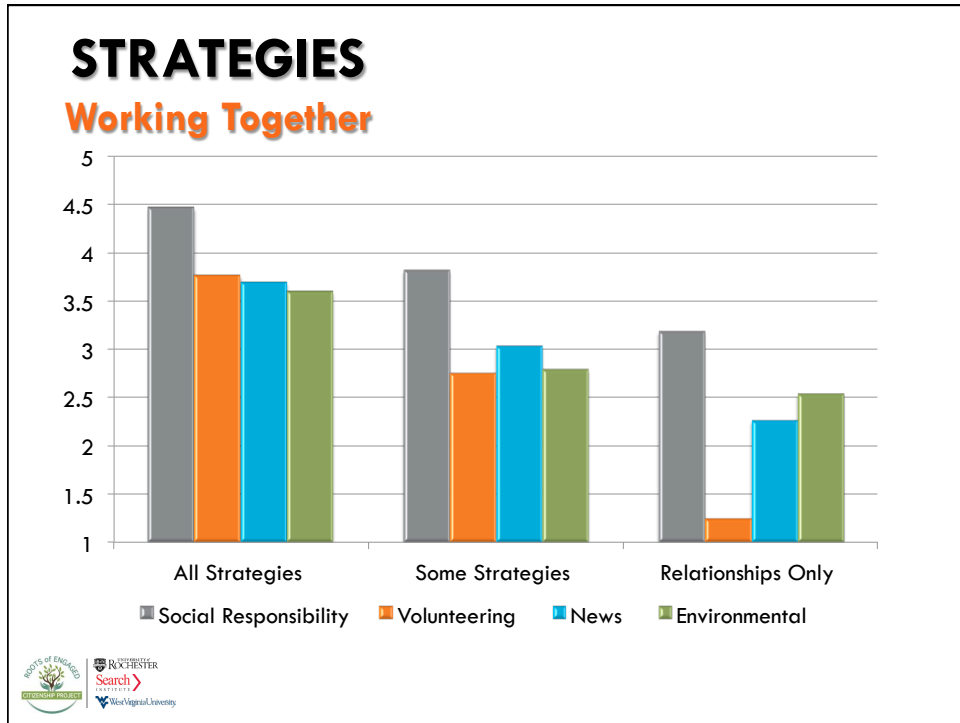
BACKGROUND DATA APPLICATION

How do these strategies work together?



4
STRATEGIES
 Work Together
 & are
 Broadly Relevant







Where can you learn more?





Amy Syvertsen, PhD

amys@search-institute.org



Laura Wray-Lake, PhD

Laura.Wray-Lake@rochester.edu



UNIVERSITY of
ROCHESTER

Aaron Metzger, PhD

Aaron.Metzger@mail.wvu.edu



West Virginia University

