



Sharing Across the States: Strategies for Engaging Young Adults

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Since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act (the health care law), advocates have been juggling two daunting tasks: advocating for robust implementation of the law, and educating the public about the provisions that will affect their everyday lives. While managing these tasks can be challenging, they actually go hand-in-hand. Ensuring successful implementation of the law will depend on the ability of the advocacy community to educate key audiences, such as young adults, about the beneficial provisions of the Affordable Care Act.

Young people can potentially benefit tremendously from the health care law. The provision that allows young adults up to age 26 to stay on or rejoin their parents' health insurance is very popular, and this measure has already led more than 600,000 young adults to obtain health coverage.¹ This provision clearly has caught the public's attention, and it offers health care advocates an opportunity to engage young adults in the larger movement to achieve health care justice.

In an effort to assist state advocacy groups with tackling the unique challenges associated with organizing this demographic, we talked to experienced organizers to determine best practices and lessons they'd learned from engaging young adults.

We spoke with state-based advocates, grassroots organizers, students, and national experts to better understand the world of youth organizing. This brief summarizes those interviews and offers the organizers' best thinking.



For brief bios of these advocates, see page 13.

Framing the Issue

As with any demographic, you need to keep your audience in mind as you develop your approach to organizing young adults, and you need to think about developing messages that will resonate with them. Organizers we interviewed said that there were definitely challenges involved in engaging young people on health reform, but they also suggested several tips that will help you hone your message and develop an effective strategy to engage this important audience.

- **Unravel the self-interest conundrum**

Identifying the audience's self-interest in your issue is a key element of good organizing, and this is especially true when trying to engage young adults. Organizers we spoke to agreed that getting young adults to identify their self-interest in health care justice and personally connect to the issue can be

challenging, simply because many have not yet had significant experience with the health care system. Young adults are and will be affected by the Affordable Care Act in many ways, and the tricky part in engaging them more deeply in the issue is getting them to realize what the impact will be on *their lives*.

Organizers we spoke with agreed on two messages that will help young adults identify their self-interest and pull them into health care advocacy: 1) frame the issue around equity, and 2) show them how the Affordable Care Act offers them stable access to coverage.

- **Connect people to coverage and then to information**

Health insurance is more likely to be on the minds of young people who are nearing graduation or who are out of school. According to a recent Census Bureau report, more than 30 percent of people aged 18-24 are uninsured.² Organizers suggest initially offering young adults something tangible by connecting them to affordable coverage, and then following up with a broader message about the law, telling them about their new rights under the Affordable Care Act.

- **Use an equity lens to discuss health care**

College campuses are often places where students are engaged in broad conversations about the world and society at large, and themes involving social equity are part of ongoing dialogues. Matt Singer, Executive Director of the Bus Federation, urges advocates to take advantage of this mentality and talk about health care using the frame of civil rights and equality. To connect with young adults on campuses, talk about equal access to health care as a civil rights issue; emphasize how unjust the current system is; and highlight how quality, affordable care is critical to helping people live full lives. Erica Williams, Millennial Strategy Director at the Citizen Engagement Lab, recommends creating talking points that are bold, dramatic, and personal to frame health care in this way.



See the box on page 3 for more ideas.

- **Put a young face on the issue**

Use personal stories to illustrate the real benefits of the Affordable Care Act for students. Because many young people have not yet had much experience with the health care system, it is important to show them what's possible (in terms of improvements that are needed) and what their peers are experiencing (in terms of negative experiences they or their families have had). Emily Schlichting, student organizer at the University of Nebraska, says that using stories has been an instrumental element of her work. It shows students that people just like them can be affected by problems with the health care system, and it helps them understand their stake in the issue.



Connecting the Affordable Care Act to Campus Social Justice Movements

Engaging campus social justice groups, such as community of color, LGBTQ, and women's rights groups, will enhance your outreach because their members may be more likely to do issue-based activism. To reach these students, you may want to frame the Affordable Care Act as a means of combating inequities in our health care system. We asked several national experts to provide advice on how to engage campus social justice groups—their answers are below.

Communities of color: Erica Williams of the Citizen Engagement Lab has dedicated her career to engaging young adults, particularly those of color. She advises advocates to talk explicitly about inequities in health care and the provisions in the health care law that are designed to address them. For example, advocates can talk about how a disproportionate lack of health coverage affects minority communities and how the health reform law addresses these disparities, which can make the issue more personal. She also suggests linking health care to current topics that are of interest to minorities, for example, health care and education, health care and unemployment, etc.

LGBTQ communities: Sam Menefee-Libey works at Campus Progress with young adults on LGBTQ issues. Over the years, he has learned that many campus LGBTQ groups' activities relate to identity issues, such as

sexuality and gender. He says that organizers have a great opportunity to show how health issues connect to identity issues. To successfully engage the LGBTQ community, Sam promotes the Affordable Care Act's emphasis on cultural competency, particularly regarding sexual health and services for transgender people.

Young women: Eesha Pandit, who worked with Raising Women's Voices and now works with Breakthrough, recommends engaging young women in health care advocacy by discussing two issues: (1) access to health care after graduation, and (2) the potential for contraception to be included as a free preventive care service. She adds that the current controversies in the news surrounding contraception can help you tie the Affordable Care Act to the reproductive rights issues that are often important to women's rights groups. Eesha also recommends using the "health equity" frame beyond issues of race and ethnicity to include gender and sexual orientation when working with young women.

Tapping into the social justice movements on campuses can be a great way to organize and engage young adults. When speaking to campus social justice and equity groups, find a personal connection, be current, and determine what's of most interest to those groups.

Organizing on Campus

On college campuses, students are already organized, which makes them ideal locations where you can find people to engage in your work. However, the number of opportunities for students on campus is enormous. The key question becomes: How do you engage students in *your* issue? Based on our interviews, there are several common strategies advocates can use to overcome this challenge.

■ Reach Students on Campus

■ Get an introduction

To make connections with students on college campuses, get an initial introduction from someone students already know. Aaron Smith, Executive Director of Young Invincibles, advises that students rarely, if ever, respond to a cold contact from someone they do not know. If they get introduced to you via someone they know and trust, they are more likely to respond, and this will help you get a foot in the door.

■ Localize, localize, localize

Everyone we spoke with agreed on this point—Organizing on college campuses must start on campus and come from students. Campaigns and events should have a local campus feel to them. Students are more likely to become involved when they are being organized by other students rather than by “real world” outside organizations. Keep events and campaigns relevant and campus-centered to maintain student interest.

■ Tap into existing networks

Because college campuses are already organized, there are many avenues for finding interested students through existing networks. Look to a wide range of organizations, from pre-professional and health-specific groups such as the American Medical Student Association, policy groups such as the Roosevelt Institute, and political groups such as the College Democrats or Republicans.

■ Understand timing

Almost every organizer we spoke with emphasized the importance of understanding timing for students and campus life. There are times of the year when students are less available, for instance, during breaks or when midterms are in full swing. Students also hold meetings at nights and on weekends, and it may be difficult for them to be available for daytime press events. Accepting this and adjusting to it from the outset will greatly ease your work and communication with students.

■ Get into the classroom

Building relationships with professors can give your group access to students in and out of the classroom. Suzanne Schlattman, Community Outreach and Development Director for Maryland Health Care for All, says that, due to an earned reputation on policy issues and on a variety of skills (including coalition building and issue-based campaign plan development), they are able to reach more students through classroom presentations. She says that by

broadening their reach in the classroom, the group is able to attract a more diverse range of students. If your organization does not already enjoy such ties, ask current interns to talk to professors about inviting someone from your organization to make a presentation in their class. Other community members, such as board members or volunteers, also might be able to help with classroom connections.



Campus Groups

Aaron Smith of Young Invincibles works with a variety of campus groups that have a stake in health care and that are on campuses across the country. Look for these names on campuses near you:

Active Minds	Future Majority
Advocates for Youth	Generational Alliance
American Medical Student Association	Law Students for Reproductive Justice
Black Youth Vote	League of Young Voters
Bus Federation	Mobilize.org
California College Democrats	NAACP College and Youth National Youth Advocacy Coalition
Campus Progress	Rock the Vote
Choice USA	Roosevelt Institute
College Democrats of America	Student PIRG
Cuenta Me	United States Student Association
Delta Upsilon Mu	Voto Latino
Democracia USA	Young Democrats of America
Energy Action Coalition	Young People For (YP4)
Feminist Majority	

■ Target “Students in the Know”

■ Find the students who can make things happen

On most campuses, there is a core group of students who are involved in multiple activities, know a lot of people, and have name recognition on campus. Try to engage these students in your project, as it will raise the profile of your event and help you connect to more people and groups. Emily Schlichting of the University of Nebraska says that connecting with these students will open even more doors on campus.

■ Target students who are interested in careers in health care or health policy

Due to the challenging job market, students are looking to get ahead by gaining career-related experience in their field while in school. Rahul Rekhi, a student organizer at Rice University, emphasized the importance of providing students who are interested in health fields (both clinical and policy) with advocacy experience. More importantly, these students can gain an understanding of the importance of advocacy at an early age and become lifelong advocates.

- **Reach nontraditional students**

Part-time students or students on community college campuses tend to be more involved in off-campus activities. Virginia Organizing has had success with bringing these students into their regular organizing efforts. According to Northern Virginia Organizer Kevin Simowitz, it takes less time to explain the issue to these students, because many of them already understand the challenges that come with finding affordable health coverage. Tactics for engaging these students tend to be more like those used with off-campus youth organizing.



For more about off-campus engagement, see page 8.

- **Build Successful Internship Programs**

- **Formalize your work with young adults**

According to several state organizers, creating robust internship programs is the best way to break into organizing young adults. Internship programs create a more formal way to work with students that increases their accountability and can help to establish your organization's presence on college campuses.

- **Make it mutually beneficial**

A good, sustainable internship program involves both time and commitment from your organization. The more you invest in making sure your interns have a good experience, the more you can expect in return. If students can see how an internship can be mutually beneficial, the internship can lead to new and innovative projects, build organizational capacity, and develop future health care justice leaders. Think about creative ways to help your interns grow and gain new skills from their positions, such as providing them with networking opportunities and helping them build stronger community connections.

- **Recruit in the classroom**

When making presentations in the classroom, highlight opportunities for students to get involved. Maryland Health Care for All recruits most of their student interns through classroom presentations, where staff clearly articulate the advantages of students' participation in health care advocacy programs.

- **Let students take the lead**

Suzanne also suggests allowing interns the opportunity to take ownership of campus work to foster more energetic engagement on their part. They know the campus environment best, and, as students, are probably your best messengers. Talk to them about possible projects to determine what grabs their attention and how they can become involved. Also, ask them about the skills they want to develop during their internship, and have staff match them to a project while providing support and assistance.

■ Guide Students to Success and Secure Their Long-Term Engagement

■ Answer “why participate?”

Clearly illustrate to students the impact they can achieve by joining your cause. Whether it involves a certain piece of legislation, changing opinions on campus, or getting news coverage, explain your goals and the importance of their role.

■ Provide mentorship

Whether you run a full-fledged internship program, have campus chapters, or are working one-on-one with students on campus, strong mentorship and guidance will enhance your work with young people, who rarely have organizing experience. After working with student organizers on a variety of campaigns, Sam Menefee-Libey with Campus Progress recommends providing “hands-on support” to students so they feel confident every step of the way and can learn effective advocacy techniques.

■ Offer leadership development opportunities

Beyond mentorship, good student organizing involves constant leadership development. As campus groups and coursework inundate students with opportunities, you can stand out from other groups by offering exciting new leadership development opportunities. Virginia Organizing provides students with special activities, such as in-depth trainings that are offered off-campus, to build more committed and involved campus chapters. For example, students who attended a training at the statehouse were ready and excited to come back to talk to their representatives during session.

■ Use traditional organizing tactics

Although some organizing tactics, messages, and strategies may be different with young adults, using traditional organizing structures is critical to maintaining your base. Identifying self-interest can be a challenge, but taking the important next steps to follow up with one-on-one conversations and other face-to-face organizing tactics can ensure longer-term engagement and the overall success of your campaign.

■ Shape the Campaign

■ Find the “fun factor”

It may sound trivial, but having an element of fun is critical to pulling in students. Matt Singer of the Bus Federation recommends organizing youth through the use of dynamic events, such as the wildly successful “Trick or Vote” project.³ For student organizer Emily Schlichting, her goal was not to get students asking “Why should I be a part of the Plus One Nebraska campaign?” but rather, “Why am I not part of the Plus One Nebraska campaign?”⁴ Make your campaign fun, instead of a chore, to keep students coming back and to create enthusiasm.

- **Think outside the press conference**

Sometimes, traditional events such as press conferences can seem as boring as a long class lecture. This demographic is much more likely to participate and take a long-term interest in your work if your events have creative, fun, and interesting elements to them. Aaron Smith with Young Invincibles suggests thinking of funny names, getting students to do something whacky, or just doing something different, such as holding a creative march or demonstration. It's important to have your media hook, but in order to get students to buy in to the project, events need to be creative and student-centered.

- **Create a buzz on campus**

Because of the insular nature of college campuses, it is disproportionately more effective to focus on word of mouth to increase turnout for your events. Students often attend events because their friends are attending, or they hear about it from multiple sources. To create buzz on a campus, be creative with your messaging and branding, use campus media to get the word out, and organize large, dynamic events whenever possible.

- **Maximize your presence, create a brand**

Young adults very much care about the look of a campaign. Make sure your branding is modern, sleek, funny, and speaks to your audience. Student organizer Emily Schlichting also recommends the use of innovative branding on products (bracelets, t-shirts, hats, etc.) to increase your footprint on campus and get students advertising and talking about your campaign.

- **Offer free food**

As most organizers know, providing food wherever and whenever you can is a good way to increase attendance. This trick is especially useful on campuses, as students are always looking for a free lunch or dinner. Lunch discussion series and pizza at meetings are easy ways to get students to your events. Although it seems like a small component of an event or meeting, providing food can make a big difference in turnout.

Organizing off Campus

Organizing young people off campus presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities that are very different from on-campus work. On the one hand, it can be more difficult, since you are not working with defined and organized campus groups. On the other hand, it can be easier, because non-college youth often identify with the struggles of obtaining affordable health coverage in a more immediate way.

- **Identify your audience and go to them**

Think about who you are trying to reach and where you can find them. Aaron Smith of Young Invincibles stresses finding the right networks, similar to campus organizing. While you can pursue a variety of avenues, it's helpful to identify who you are organizing, and then tailor your outreach to that individual or group. Groups we talked to had a variety of approaches to off-campus organizing, such as targeting networks of young professionals, or targeting faith communities to reach communities of color.

- **Get in line**

Once you identify your target audience, organizers recommend finding “clearinghouses,” or popular places where youth congregate. Matt Singer of the Bus Federation has had success running street canvasses in local downtown hotspots, such as coffee shops or farmers’ markets. He also recommends going to places with lines of people waiting, such as ice cream parlors or concerts. Find people where they are hanging around with some time on their hands and encourage them to sign up.
- **Host high-energy social events**

Similar to campus organizing, use dynamic events to attract people to your campaign. Sam Menefee-Libey of Campus Progress suggests pulling people in through event-centered outreach. Examples include concerts, film screenings, and events at bars. For off-campus youth, offering opportunities for networking and social interaction can be the best way get people involved.
- **Use community connections**

Non-college youth often have much stronger ties to their local communities than campus youth. Take advantage of this by identifying their self-interests and building stronger community bonds. Sam Menefee-Libey with Campus Progress has found success with strengthening these connections by engaging older, more established community members in organizing and mentoring younger people.

Reaching Young People through Media

Reaching young adults through traditional news sources is very difficult. According to a 2010 Pew Research Center Media Consumption Survey, only 23 percent of all Americans aged 18-29 read daily newspapers, and only 31 percent say they watch local news stations.⁵ Meanwhile, according to the same survey, 48 percent of young adults say they get their news online. The study also found that only 27 percent of people aged 18-29 say they enjoy following the news. Young adults are using fewer and fewer traditional news sources and relying more heavily on online sources for news. Because of this challenge, organizers emphasized the importance of thinking outside the box for media work.

- **“Traditional” Media**
 - **Take advantage of campus publications**

Depending on the size and popularity of campus newspapers, they can be a very effective tool for reaching campus audiences. Keep submissions relevant to the campus. It is important that articles and submissions come from students and fit with the local campus environment. The “cookie cutter” approach will likely not be effective for campus publications.

- **Use alternative weeklies**

Matt Singer of the Bus Federation recommends alternative weeklies as a good media outlet to reach young people. In larger cities, there are usually several different weeklies that reach distinct key audiences. It's relatively easy to get a column or article placed in these newspapers, and they often have niche followings. As with every aspect of young adult organizing, remember your audience, and tailor your message to make it interesting.
- **Start the conversation on popular blogs**

Another good way to reach young adults is through the blogosphere. There are many blogs that primarily reach a young audience and that encourage guest posts and dialogue. Bring up health care on these sites and relate it to the readers' primary concerns or issues.
- **Take advantage of milestones**

Certain events in students' lives can be good media hooks. Consider events and actions that are centered around back-to-school time, graduation, and spring break to augment your chances of garnering media attention.
- **Social Media**
 - **Make social media a must**

According to a 2011 Harvard Institute of Politics survey, young people are much more likely to take a stand on an issue online than by making calls or sending emails.⁶ In other words, while face-to-face organizing is essential, all of your work with young adults should also have an online component.
 - **Be strategic**

Social media is an excellent way to spread the word about your issue, educate, build your network, and advertise events. But there are ways to be strategic about your Facebook posts, Twitter updates, and online campaigns. Read best practices, such as the *Guide to Social Media* created by Tigercomm, and be cognizant of how many times you are posting and who is reading your posts. Engage your fans in a dialogue rather than just a one-way conversation.
 - **Go viral**

Social media sites such as Facebook can help boost existing social interactions on campus communities. In other words, the same people who see each other every day in the dorm, at the dining hall, and in class also are communicating with each other online. Take advantage of this echo chamber by creating Facebook actions, posts, status updates, and videos that have the potential to "go viral" (meaning that the posts would be spread across various social media rapidly and reach a large number of people).



See Resources on
page 12.

- **Incorporate national news**

Since young adults don't see much local news, use health care coverage from well-known national outlets, such as CNN, *The New York Times*, or the *Huffington Post*, to spread the word online. Matt Singer has found that young adults are more inclined to share national articles from sources they know rather than information from local media outlets. Sharing these high-profile news articles increases your chances of students passing them along.

- **Focus on content rather than production value**

Videos are an excellent advocacy tool if done well. We heard from multiple sources that having a video with strong content is much more important than having a high-quality video. Focus on making your video relevant, funny, and something people will want to share rather than creating a well-produced video.

Conclusion

Educating key audiences about the benefits they'll get from the Affordable Care Act will be critical to building support for and ensuring robust implementation of the law. Because young adults stand to gain substantially from the law, advocates have an exciting opportunity to educate and engage them in the broader health care justice movement.

This brief summarized advice and lessons learned from seasoned youth organizers to help you better develop your young adult outreach and overcome the unique challenges of this work. We recognize that these efforts look different in every community. It is our hope that continued communication across the states will contribute to creating innovative and successful public education and engagement strategies in the future.

¹ "At Least 600,000 Young Adults Join Parents' Health Plans under New Law," *Kaiser Health News*, May 3, 2011, available online at <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Stories/2011/May/01/young-adult-health-insurance-coverage.aspx>.

² Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009* (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010), available online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>.

³ "Trick or Vote" project, The Bus Federation, Portland, Oregon, online at <http://trickorvote.org/>.

⁴ Plus One Nebraska Campaign, Lincoln, Nebraska, online at <http://plusonenebraska.org>.

⁵ Pew Research Center for People and the Press, *Americans Spending More Time Following the News* (Washington: Pew Research Center for People and the Press, September 12, 2010), available online at <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/652.pdf>.

⁶ Harvard Institute of Politics, *Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Institute of Politics, March 31, 2011), available online at http://www.iop.harvard.edu/var/ezp_site/storage/fckeditor/file/IOP_Spring_2011_Topline.pdf.

Resources

At Least 600,000 Young Adults Join Parents' Health Plans under New Law (Kaiser Health News)

<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Stories/2011/May/01/young-adult-health-insurance-coverage.aspx>.

Americans Spending More Time Following the News (Pew Research Center for People and the Press)

<http://people-press.org/2010/09/12/americans-spending-more-time-following-the-news/>.

Graduation Tool Kit (Young Invincibles, with support from Families USA)

<http://www.gettingcovered.org/Toolkit/>

A Guide to Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, and Blogging (Tigercomm)

http://www.familiesusa2.org/key-contacts/guide_to_social_media.pdf

Health Reform Is a Good Deal for Young People (Young Invincibles)

http://speak.younginvincibles.org/t/10987/blog/comments.jsp?key=128&blog_entry_KEY=1641&t=

Young Person's Guide to Health Insurance (U.S. PIRG, with support from Families USA)

<http://familiesusa2.org/assets/pdfs/health-reform/USPIRG-Young-Adults-Brochure.pdf>

Sharing Your Story

If you are young person who is benefitting from the new health care law (or know someone who is), you can help protect the law that is protecting you! Stories like yours can help us illustrate the real help that people are receiving--and what they stand to lose if the law is repealed.

To learn more, or to share your story, please contact our Story Bank Coordinator at 202-628-303 or at storybank@familiesusa.org.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank all of the organizers who took the time to share the lessons they've learned from developing young leaders in their states. Without them, this guide would not have been possible.

If you want to learn more about the work of any of the organizations below or have something to share about organizing young adults in your state, please contact us at stateinfo@familiesusa.org.

American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

Sonia Lazreg, AMSA/CIR Health Justice Fellow

Danielle Salovich, National President

Liz Wiley, Legislative Co-Director

Danielle, Liz, and Sonia work with a network of campus chapters across the country that focuses on a variety of health issues, including expanding health coverage, global health equity, enriching medicine through diversity, and professional integrity.

Breakthrough

Eesha Pandit, Women's Rights Manger

Breakthrough is a global human rights organization that uses the power of media, pop culture, and community mobilization to inspire people to take bold action for dignity, equality, and justice. Eesha is the former Director of Advocacy at MergerWatch, where she worked on the Raising Women's Voices project, a national initiative that is working to make sure that women's voices are heard and that women's concerns are addressed in national health reform policy. She has also worked with the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University and Amnesty International USA's Women's Rights Program.

The Bus Federation

Matt Singer, Executive Director

Matt oversees the Bus Federation's national programs, including "Trick or Vote," and he works with state-based affiliates, such as the Oregon Bus Project, Forward Montana, the Washington Bus, and New Era Colorado. Before joining the group, he helped found Forward Montana in 2004 and became its first executive director in 2007. In 2010, he was named one of "40 under 40" progressive leaders by the New Leaders Council.

Campus Progress

Sam Menefee-Libey, LGBTQ Advocacy Associate

Campus Progress works with and for young people to promote progressive solutions to key political and social challenges. Sam works with students on LGBTQ-focused campaigns across the country. Prior to this position, Sam was an organizing fellow at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a new leader with the Center for Progressive Leadership, and a

grassroots organizing trainer with the United States Students Association. He also has spent time fighting poverty as an AmeriCorps member in New York City with City Year, as well as fundraising in Los Angeles with the Fund for Public Interest Research.

Citizen Engagement Lab

Erica Williams, Director of Millennial Strategies

Erica has spent years managing and working with and on behalf of Millennials around the country to advance their interests and engagement in civic life. She previously served as the Deputy Director of Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress that develops new policy ideas for an increasingly diverse America. Erica is a 2008 *O Magazine* “Women Rule” leadership winner and a 2008 Aspen Institute IDEAS fellow that is listed by Politico.com as one of the Top 50 Politicos to Watch.

Maryland Health Care for All

Suzanne Schlattman, Community Outreach and Development Director

Maryland Health Care for All is the state’s largest health care consumer organization, with more than 1,200 members. Suzanne works with Health Care for All’s volunteers, manages fundraising efforts, and coordinates major public education campaigns, such as the “Get Health Care?” Medicaid outreach and enrollment blitz. She also helps manage their successful internship program.

Student PIRG

Megan Fitzgerald, Program Director

Megan works with Student PIRG campus chapters across the country on a variety of issue-based campaigns. Student PIRGs have a unique campus structure, which involves paid organizers who are present on campuses to work with students.

Virginia Organizing

Brian Johns, Organizing Director

Virginia Organizing is a statewide, grassroots organization that is dedicated to empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives. Brian first came to Virginia Organizing as an intern in 2000, and he worked as a community organizer from 2001-2005. He then spent two years in Pennsylvania doing community organizing with a labor union, and he returned to Virginia Organizing in 2007. He is currently the organizer for far southwest Virginia.

Kevin Simowitz, Northern Virginia Organizer

Kevin interned with Virginia Organizing for three years while he was a student at the University of Virginia. After graduating in 2008, he began working with Virginia Organizing as the Northern Virginia Organizer. Now, he manages their campus chapter program, which works with students across the state.

Young Invincibles

Aaron Smith, Executive Director

Aaron is cofounder and Executive Director of Young Invincibles, a national nonprofit organization that seeks to expand opportunity for young adults (ages 18-34), particularly around access to health coverage and care. In 2006, Aaron became the campaign manager of a New York State Assembly race, and he went on to become the chief legislative aide for the Yonkers City Council President. While serving the city, Aaron helped to organize a living wage campaign and to draft a new affordable housing ordinance, and he created the first Yonkers Green Policy Task Force to promote environmentally friendly policies for the city.

Students

Emily Schlichting, Student Organizer, University of Nebraska

Emily regularly works with Young Invincibles on health reform issues. On campus, Emily is the Speaker of the Student Government Senate, has run two student government campaigns, and is the Founder-Director of the Plus One Nebraska campaign, which aims to bring Employee + 1 benefits to the University of Nebraska. Her work on the Plus One Nebraska campaign ranges from planning fresh, innovative events for students to sending out action alerts to get the attention of the Board of Regents.

Rahul Rekhi, Student Organizer, Rice University

As a Senior Fellow at the Health Policy Center of the Roosevelt Institute, Rahul has developed a health care tool kit for young Americans. His group also runs a nationwide student internship program at the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, which allows the youth voice to be represented. Prior to this position, as the resident health care expert for the Budget for Millennial America project, Rahul helped create a federal budget proposal through the year 2040—a vision for America's future that was produced purely by Millennials, which was presented at the Peterson Foundation's 2011 Fiscal Summit.

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