

**Laura Wray-Lake, Ph.D.**  
**Jennifer Shubert, B.S.**



Military Child  
Education Coalition

*National Training  
Seminar*

July 31, 2015

# Character Development and Engaged Citizenship among Children and Adolescents





# 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.

# Audience Polling

Use your smart phone or laptop.

Type “**respond.cc**” into the browser.

Enter the session key.

Answer the question.

Submit with the check box!

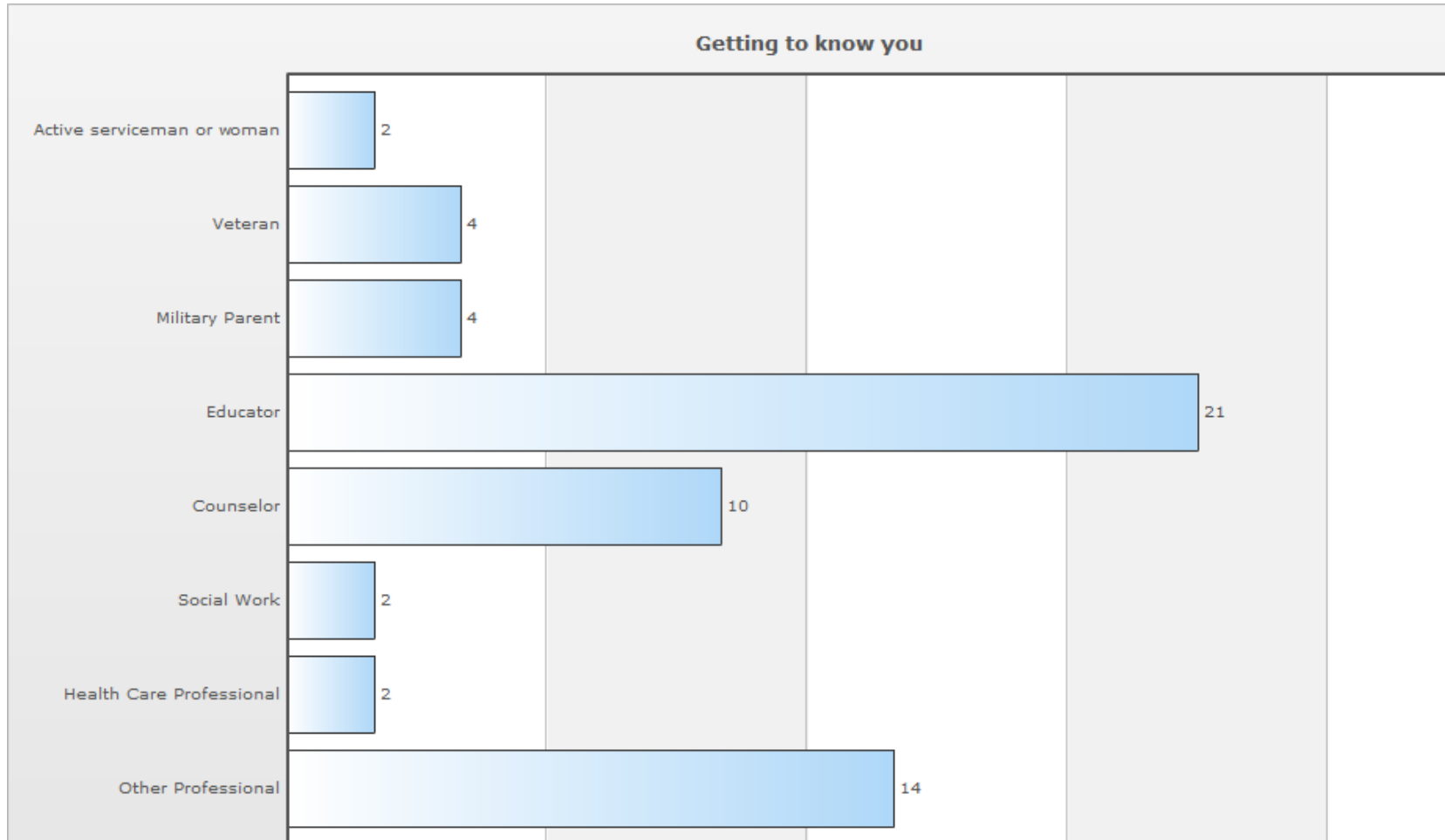
Tell us about you!

[respond.cc](https://respond.cc)

Session Key:  
**70406**



# Getting to Know You



# Session Overview

- Background
- Civic Engagement → Character
- Strategies → Civic Engagement
- Wrap Up

Respond.cc

Session key: **92659**

**POLL:** What is the **first thing** that comes to mind when you hear the term “**civic engagement**”?

# Rich Vision of Civic Engagement

“Participation, your civic duty, is more than just voting...Only you can make sure the democracy you inherit is as good as we know it can be. But it requires your dedicated, and informed, and engaged citizenship. And that citizenship is a harder, higher road to take, but it leads to a better place. It’s how we built this country—together.”

President Barack Obama

May 5, 2013



# What is Youth Civic Engagement?



# Why do we care about youth civic engagement?

Builds strong communities

Establishes life-long habits

Benefits health & development

Cultivates **CHARACTER**

Civic  
engagement is  
a **strength** of  
military  
families.

Photo Credit: Noel Abejo

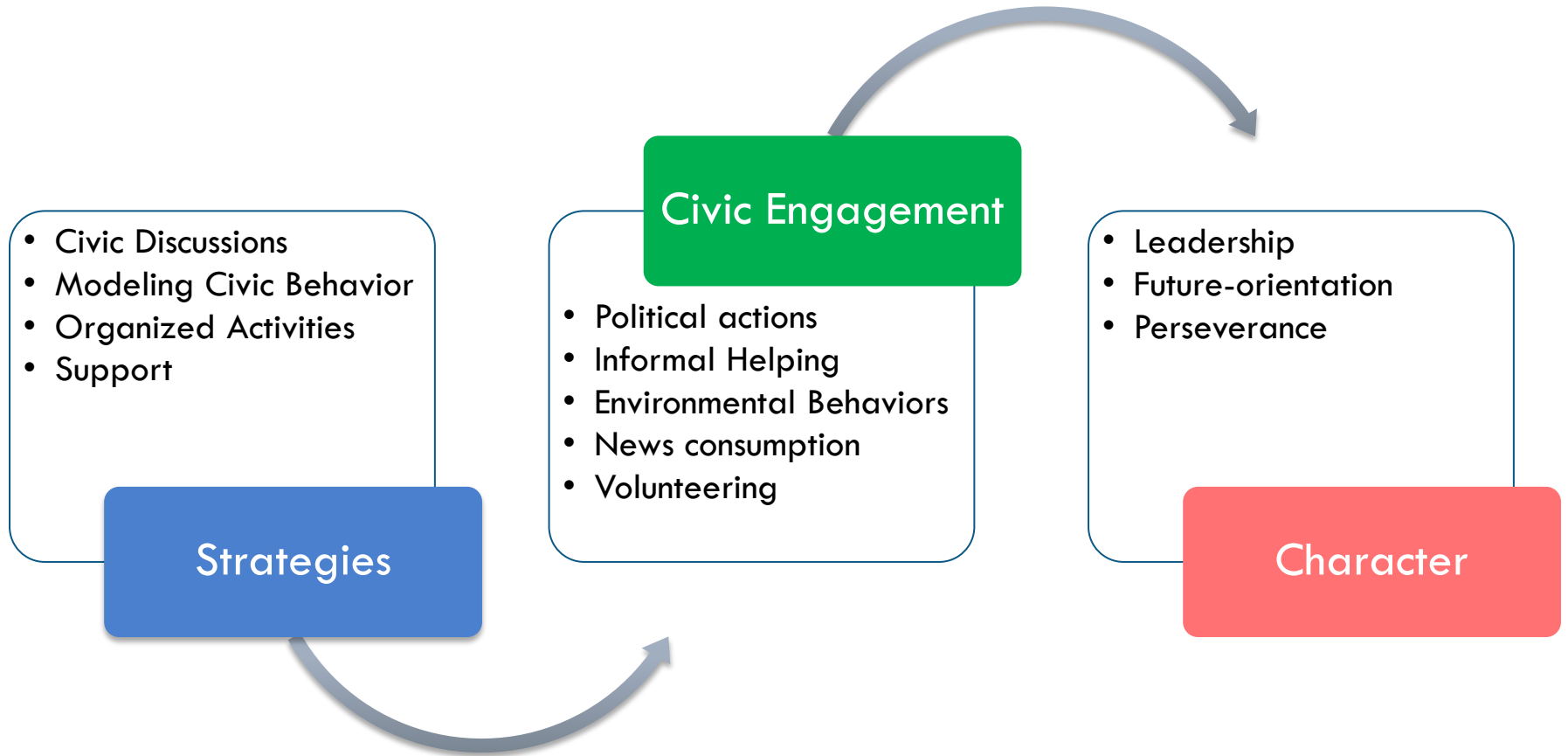


# Importance of Studying Character

- Component of PYD that **enables thriving**
- Associated with **academic success**
- Linked to **well-being**

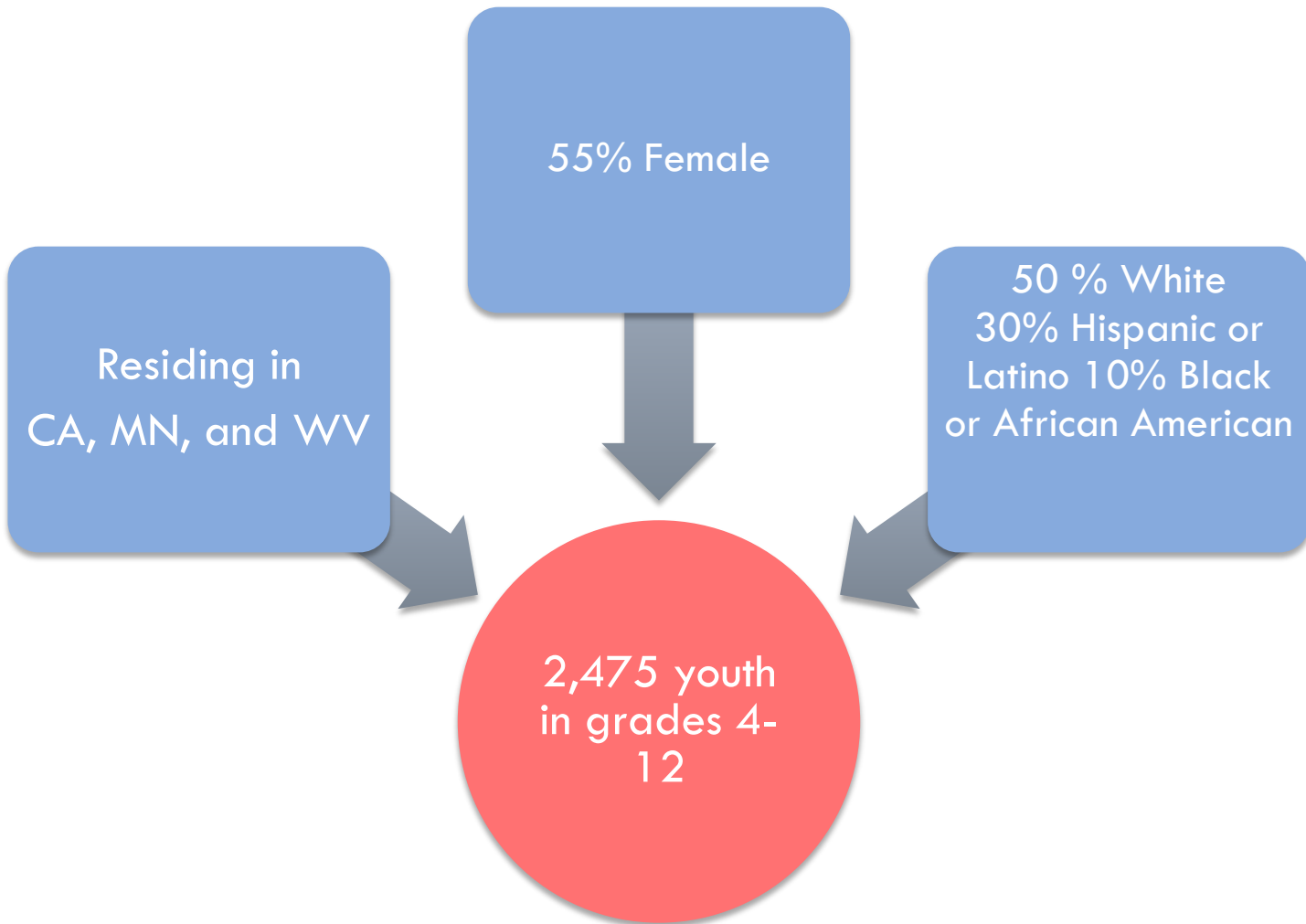


# Our Theory



# Our Sample

---



# Character

---

## Leadership

- I am good at leading others to reach a goal.
- My peers consider me to be a leader.
- I am usually the one who suggests activities to my friends.

## Perseverance

- When I get stuck on something I'm working on, I keep trying until I figure it out.
- I almost always finish things that I start.
- I am a hard worker

## Future Orientation

- I am hopeful about my future.
- When I make a decision, I consider the impact it will have on my future.
- I think about who I will be when I'm older.
- I believe I am going to make a difference in the world.
- I feel a sense of purpose in life.
- I have plans for my future.

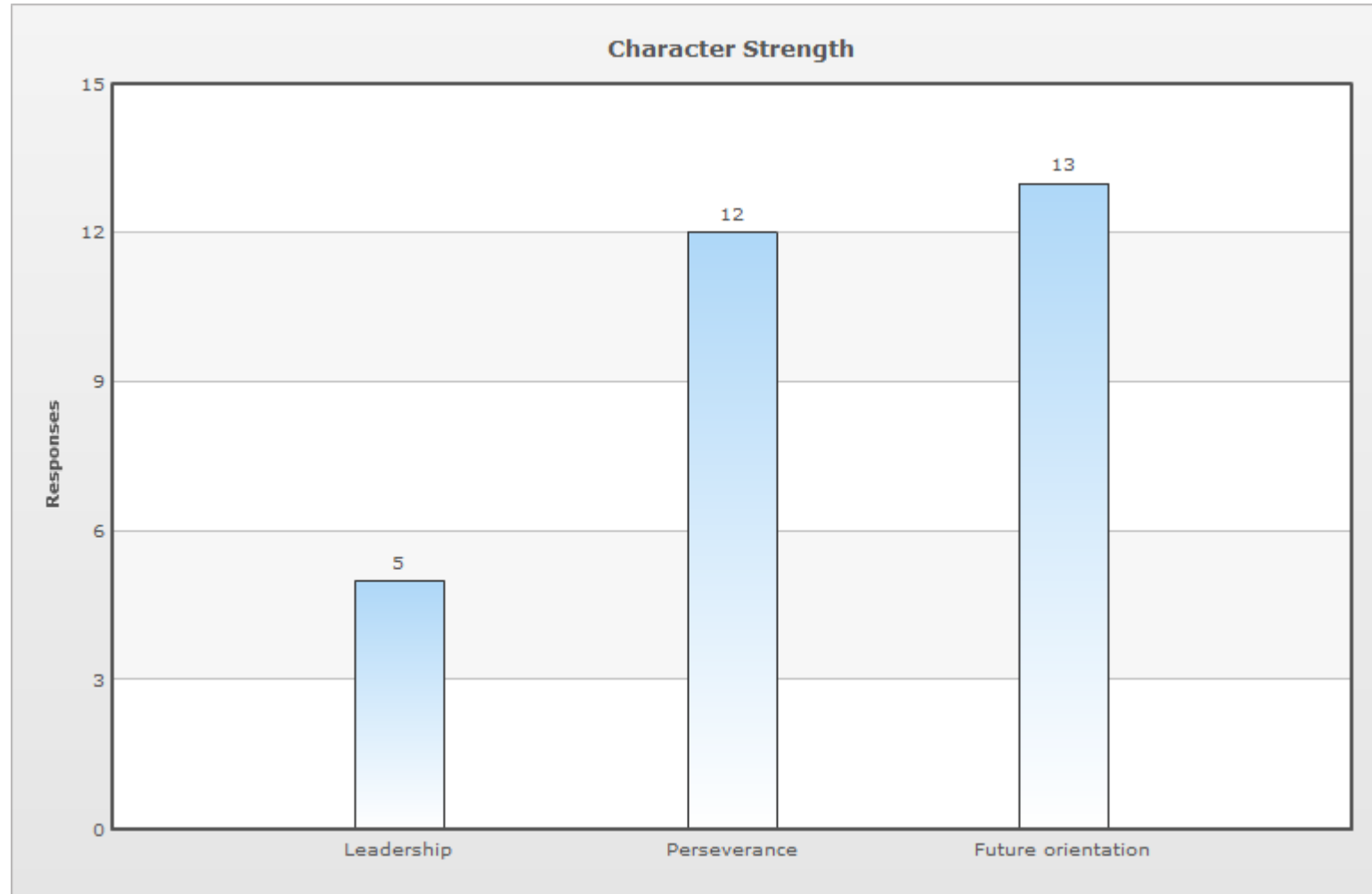
Respond.cc

Session key: **18870**

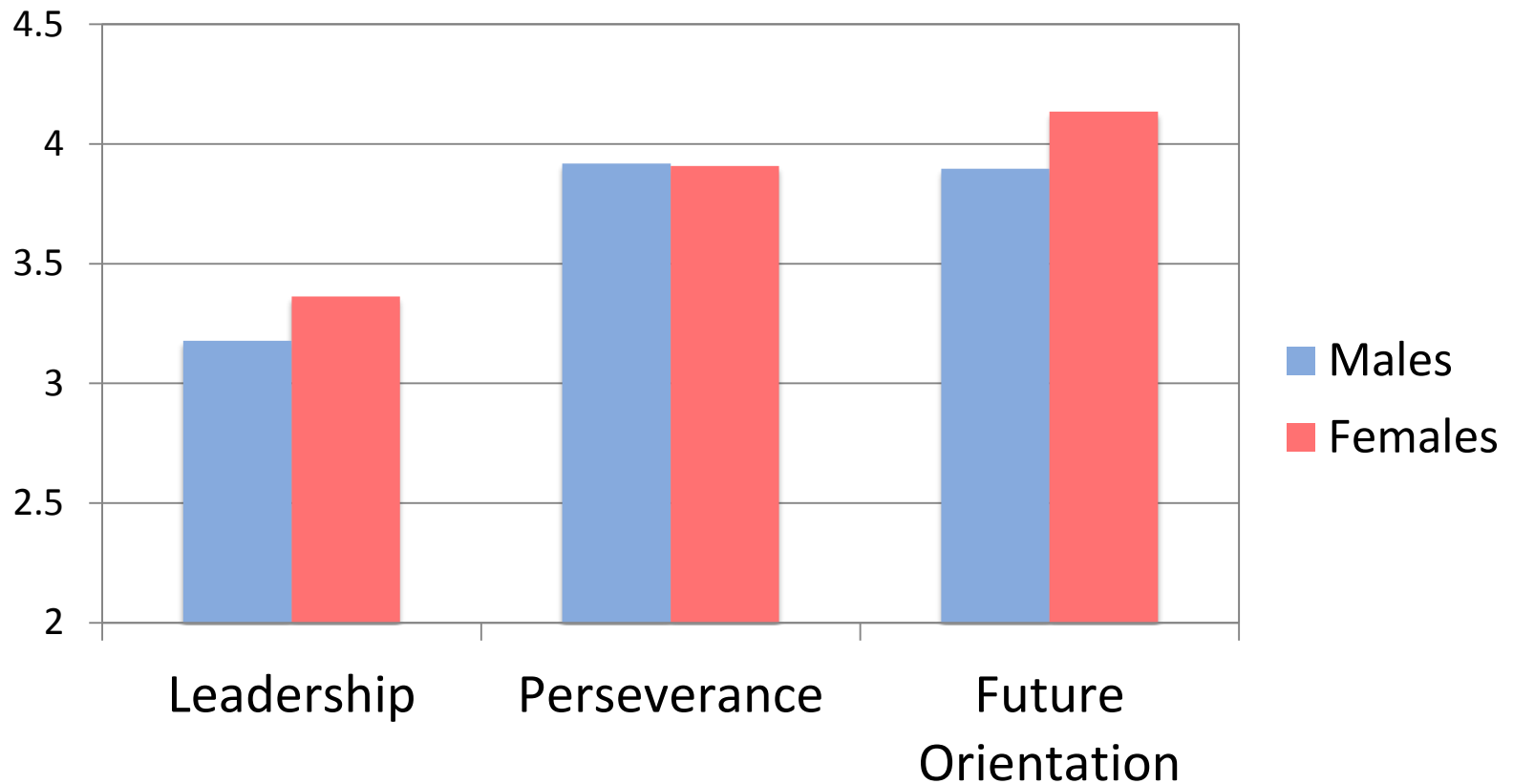
**POLL:** Which character strength do you think is highest among youth?



# Results: Which character strength do YOU think is highest?



# Character in Youth



# Civic Engagement → Character



Civic experiences **cultivate**  
character strengths.

# Leadership, Future Orientation, and Perseverance

**Informal helping and skills** predict  
*all three* character strengths.

Volunteering

Leadership

News Consumption  
Voting Intentions  
Civic Skills

Future  
Orientation

Environmental

Perseverance

# How to Apply

- Informal, unstructured behaviors help develop character
- Practicing civic skills → big payoffs



**DISCUSS**  
Civic Issues

**PROVIDE**  
Opportunities

**MODEL**  
Civic  
Behaviors

**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# Strategies to Promote Civic Engagement

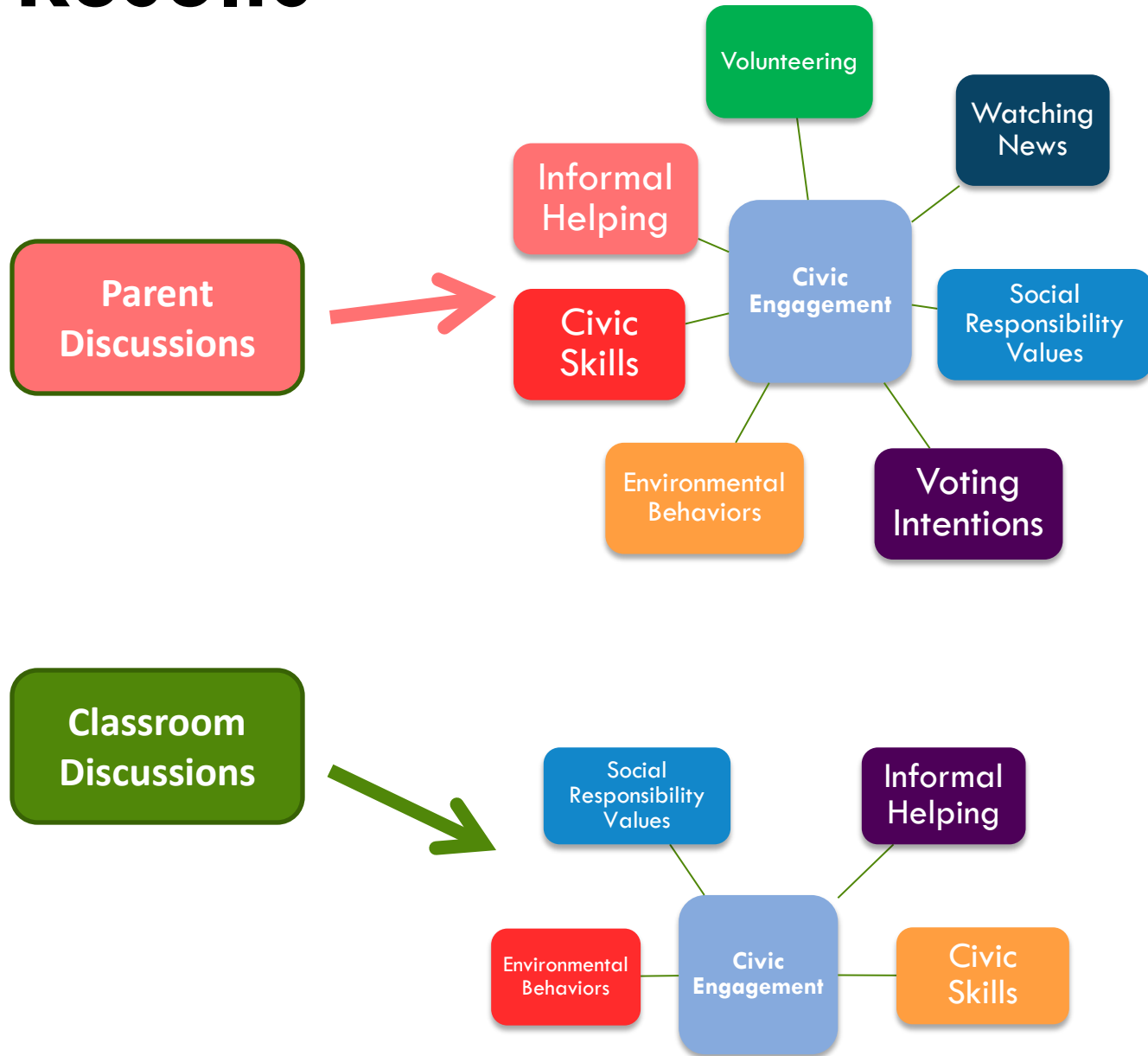
**DISCUSS**  
Civic Issues

# Background

- Stresses importance of these topics
- Expands youth's **civic knowledge and understanding**
- Youth civic engagement is **enhanced** when teachers and parents discuss:
  - Politics
  - Current events
  - Problems facing their community
  - Injustice

**DISCUSS**  
Civic Issues

# Results





**DISCUSS**  
Civic Issues

# Results

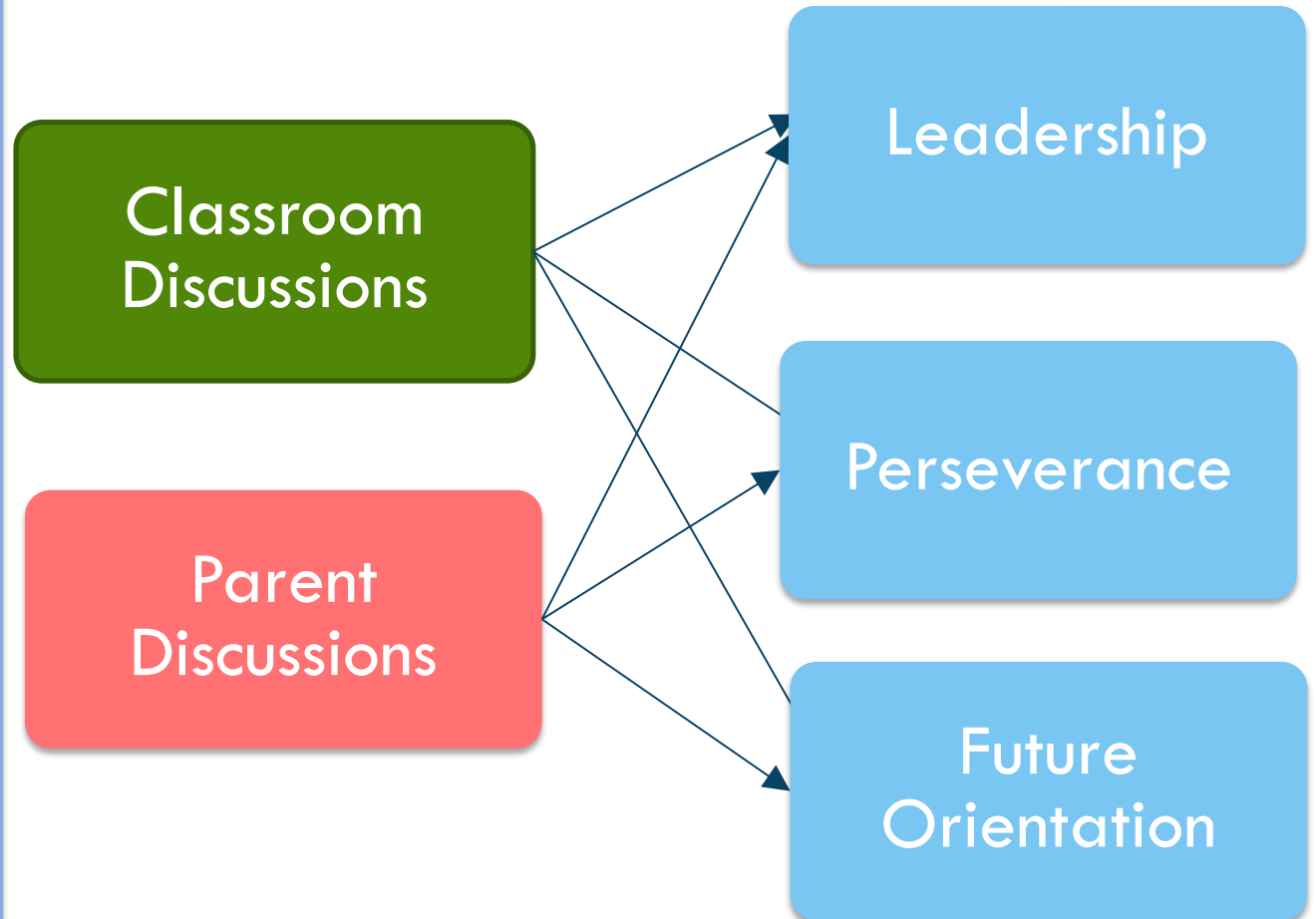
Classroom  
Discussions

Parent  
Discussions

Leadership

Perseverance

Future  
Orientation



**DISCUSS**  
Civic Issues

# How to Apply

- Look for **opportunities**
- Choose the right words
- Be **open** to the youth's opinions



**MODEL**  
Civic  
Behaviors

# Background

- Social Learning Theory
- Children **imitate and emulate** the behavior of people who are important to them – **PARENTS**



**MODEL**  
Civic  
Behaviors

# Youth's Views on Parents' Modeling

- **23%** Parents volunteer
- **56%** Parents vote
- **31%** Parents follow the news
- **28%** Parents actively improve the neighborhood

**MODEL**  
Civic  
Behaviors

# Results

Parent Civic  
Engagement

Youth Civic  
Engagement

Character  
Development

**MODEL**  
Civic  
Behaviors

# How to Apply

- Volunteer with youth
- Contact local organizations
- Pick a project  
[www.generationon.org](http://www.generationon.org)
- Be spontaneous
- Seize the little moments



**POLL:** Which matters more  
for civic and character  
development? **QUANTITY** or  
**QUALITY** of organized  
activities?

Respond.cc

Session key: **16917**

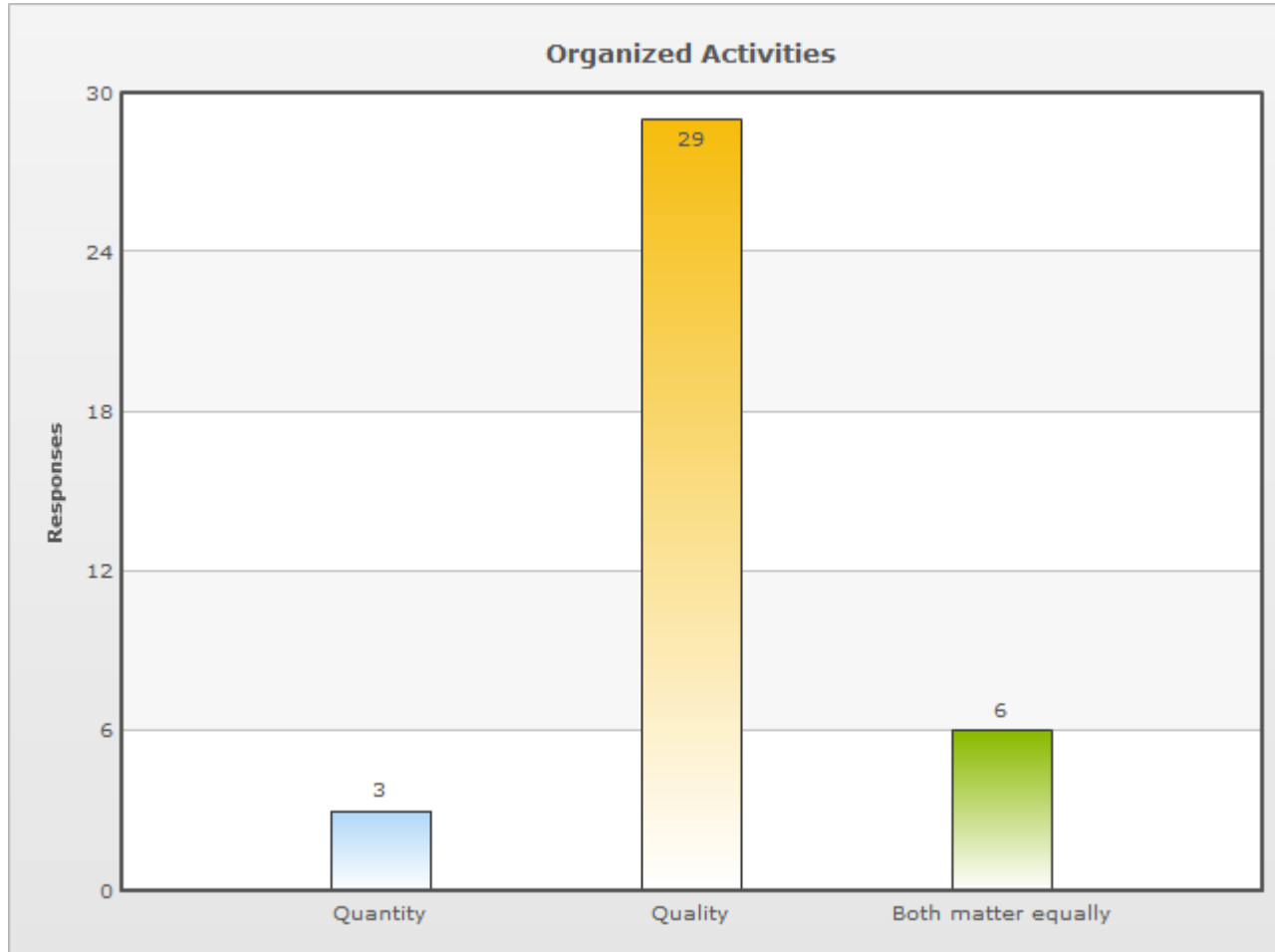
**PROVIDE**  
Opportunities

# Organized Activities

- Sports, school clubs, community organizations, religious groups.
- Personal Growth Experiences
  - Learning about self and what is important to self
  - Learning new skills
  - Doing something you enjoy that gives you energy and passion



# Results: Quantity vs. Quality



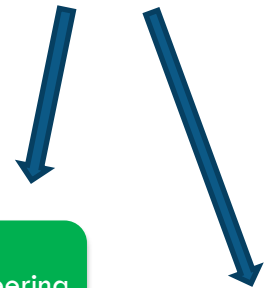
**PROVIDE**  
Opportunities

# Results

**High Quality  
Organized  
Activities**



**Quantity:  
Time in  
Activities**



PROVIDE  
Opportunities

# How to Apply

- Quality matters
- Infuse **quality** into activities
- Help youth find their **spark**



**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# Background

- Respect opinions
- Listen to show you care
- Give positive feedback
- Build close connections

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

**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# Results

**HIGH SUPPORT**  
from **PARENTS and TEACHERS**

**+**

**LOW across other three strategies**

**=**

**LOW levels of Civic Engagement**



**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# Results

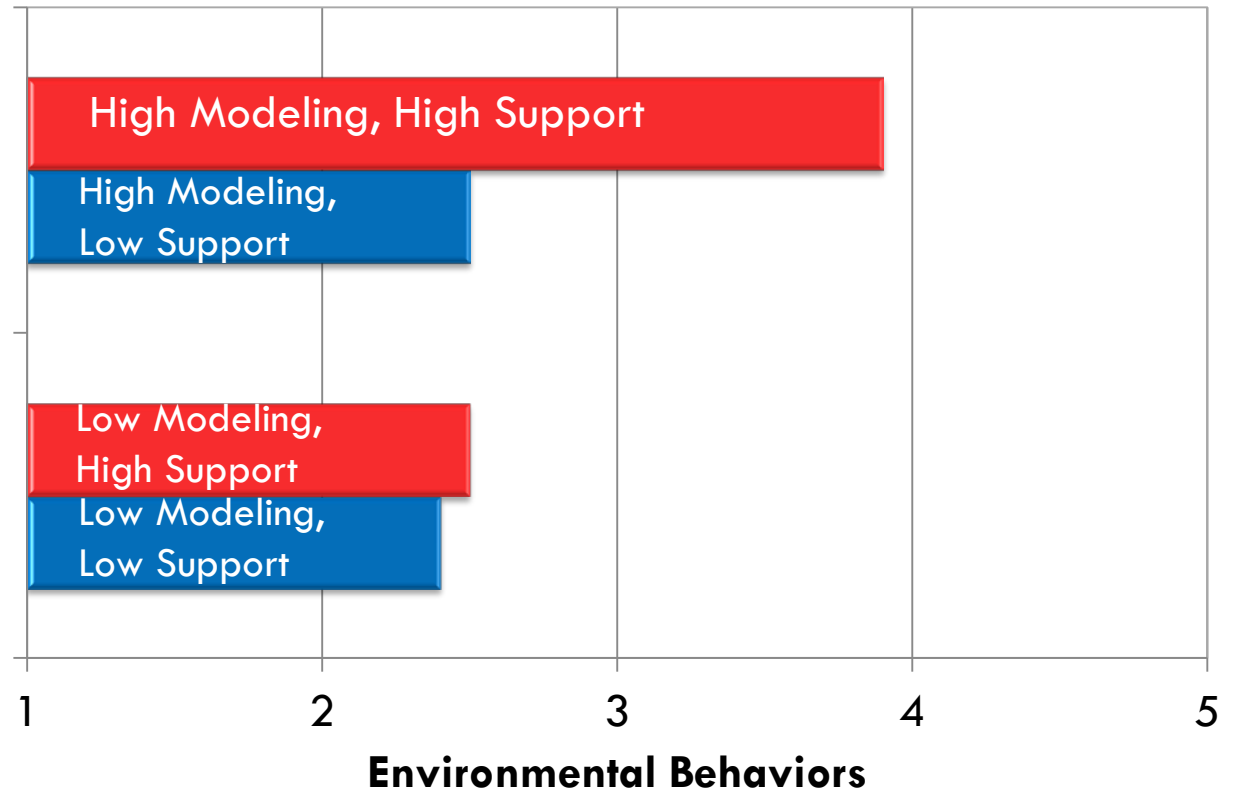
Supportive relationships  
**enhance the effectiveness of  
other strategies.**



**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# Results

## Parenting and Environmental Behaviors



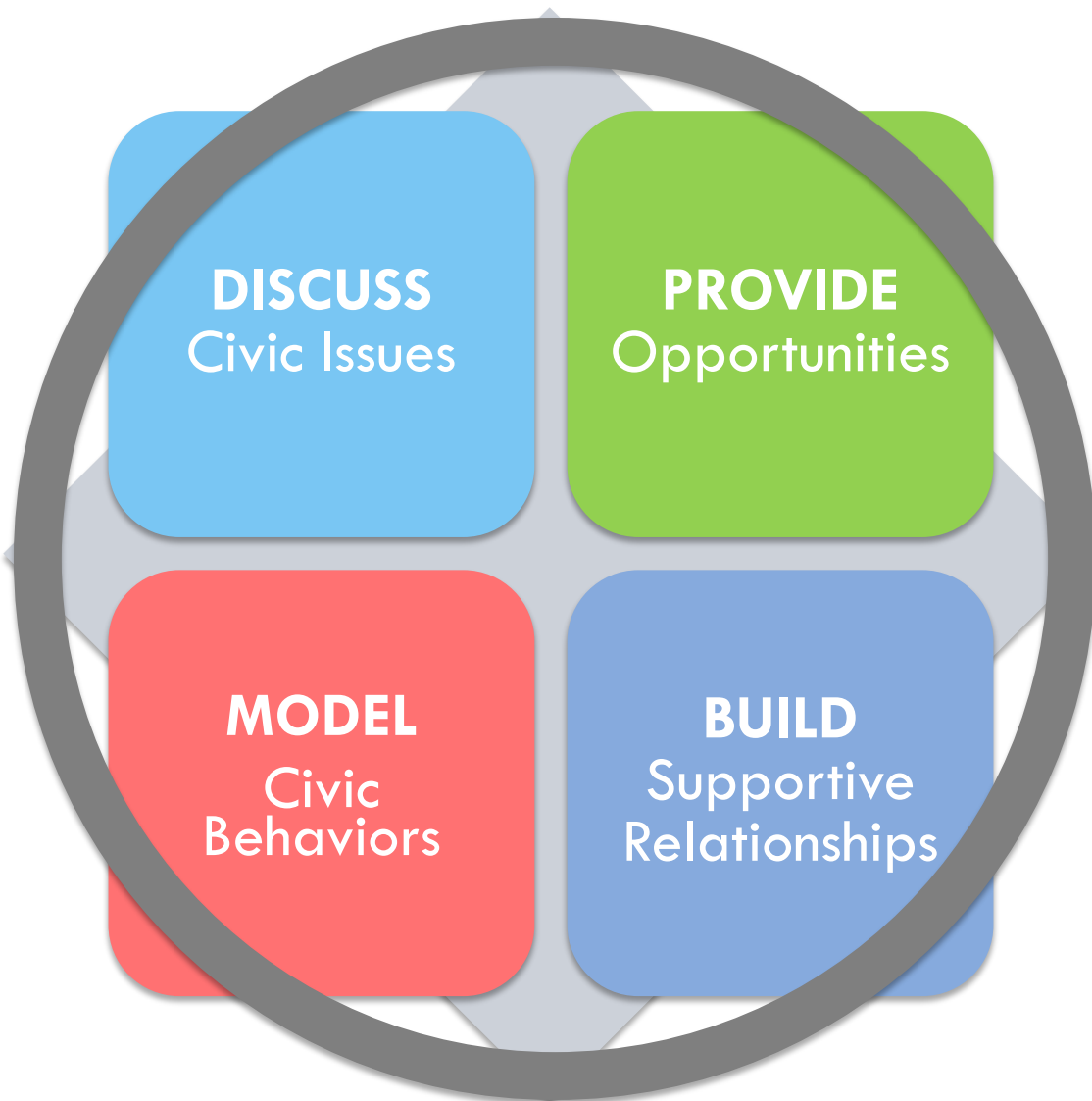
**BUILD**  
Supportive  
Relationships

# How to Apply

- Visit [parentfurther.com](https://parentfurther.com)
- Take the quizzes
- Get personalized feedback and strategies

The screenshot shows the ParentFurther website homepage. At the top right, there are links for "About Parent Further" and "Register or Log In". The main navigation bar includes the "ParentFurther" logo (with the tagline "a Search Institute resource for families") and three menu items: "Strengthen Relationships", "Prepare for the Future", and "Understand Ages & Stages". The main content area features a large image of a man and a young girl embracing. Overlaid on the image is the text "Great Relationships Don't Just Happen." To the right of the image, a blue box contains the heading "Strengthen Yours Here." followed by the subtext "Start with a short quiz about parent-kid relationships and preparing kids for success." Below this, a list of four topics is shown in white boxes: "Express Care", "Share Power", "Prevent Alcohol and Tobacco Use", and "Spark Kids' Motivation".





**How do  
they work  
together?**

# STRATEGIES

## Working Together

---



**Doing it all?**

# Take-Home Messages

---

- Civic engagement **builds character.**
- Adults can implement strategies that cultivate civic engagement.
- **Civic engagement is a strength of military families** that can be leveraged for positive development.

# Next Steps

- Study military families directly and in-depth.





# Thank you!

**Laura Wray-Lake, Ph.D.**

Laura.wray-lake@rochester.edu

**Jennifer Shubert, B.S.**

Jennifer.shubert@rochester.edu



## **Acknowledgements:**

Amy Syvertsen

Aaron Metzger

Roots Project Team

PYD Lab (especially Karen Fu)



UNIVERSITY *of*  
**ROCHESTER**



Visit our website  
[www.civicroots.org](http://www.civicroots.org)



John  
Templeton  
Foundation