

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

September 29, 2014

**NEW DATA SHOWS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERING LINKED TO LOWER RATES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-WORK YOUTH, GREATER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

*High volunteerism rates are associated with lower rates of disconnected youth and also lower rates of income inequality across all 50 states and Washington, D.C.*

BOSTON, MA – A new report released today by Opportunity Nation, with support from the Citi Foundation, provides fresh and compelling evidence that certain types of civic engagement predict positive outcomes for at-risk and low income youth and the economic health of states.

“Connecting Youth and Strengthening Communities: *The Data Behind Civic Engagement and Economic Opportunity*” was produced by Opportunity Nation with data and analysis provided by Measure of America, and builds on previous studies that explore the relationship between civic engagement and upward mobility.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

After controlling for a variety of factors, including race and ethnicity, the report’s findings suggest:

- **Controlling for differences across 25 largest metro areas, the chance that a young adult is disconnected from work or school drops in half, from 11.1 percent to 5.7 percent, if he or she volunteers.**
- **Civic engagement - specifically volunteering and participation in a civic or service organization - is a significant predictor of economic opportunity across states.**
- **Volunteerism has an inverse relationship with income inequality. In places with higher rates of volunteerism, income inequality tends to be lower.**

Using the lens of the [Opportunity Index](#), a data-rich tool that measures the conditions present in communities that expand or restrict upward mobility, the report highlights how civic engagement may help youth, particularly low-income teens and young adults ages 16-24, build social capital and skills that can help them find meaningful education and career pathways. The analysis also found that two forms of civic engagement – volunteering and membership in a civic or service organization – are significant predictors of economic opportunity across states.

“We hope our findings serve as a rallying cry for increased attention and support for civic engagement initiatives,” said Russell Krumnow, Managing Director of Opportunity Nation. “Volunteering or joining in a charitable cause are not just feel-good activities, but powerful ways to increase economic opportunity at a time when Americans are searching for as many tools as possible to improve their prospects and provide for their families.”

“Today 5.8 million young people—about one in seven Americans between the ages of 16 and 24—are

neither working nor in school,” said Kristen Lewis, Co-Director of Measure of America. “Finding ways to connect them to mainstream opportunities is vital to their futures.”

In March 2014, the Citi Foundation launched [\*Pathways to Progress\*](#), a \$50 million commitment to jumpstart economic opportunities for 100,000 low-income young people in 10 major U.S. cities. A key component of this initiative is ServiceWorks, the largest corporate-sponsored AmeriCorps VISTA program – funded by the Citi Foundation and launched in partnership with Points of Light in July. Through ServiceWorks, AmeriCorps VISTA members engage young people in civic engagement and volunteerism activities.

“As the needs of employers continue to evolve, it is crucial that young people are prepared with the workplace skills and leadership experience necessary to compete in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy,” said Brandee McHale, Chief Operating Officer of the Citi Foundation. “The findings of this report by Opportunity Nation confirm that civic engagement and volunteerism activities - like those happening through ServiceWorks - can be an effective onramp for helping young people move towards college and career success.”

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Our findings support specific calls to action, including:

- The expansion of volunteering opportunities for low-income youth;
- Increased membership in civic and service organizations for Americans of all ages;
- More employer-led volunteer programs and civic projects to ensure professionals interact with youth one-on-one with a goal of helping more young Americans build the skills, confidence and networks they need to succeed in today’s workforce.

To read a full copy of the report: <http://opportunitynation.org/power-of-civic-engagement/>

### **About Opportunity Nation:**

Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national coalition of more than 300 businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions and community leaders working to expand economic opportunity. Opportunity Nation seeks to close the opportunity gap by amplifying the work of its coalition members, advocating policy and private sector actions and releasing the annual Opportunity Index, a composite measure at the state and county levels of economic, educational and civic factors that foster opportunity.

### **About Measure of America:**

Measure of a America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being, opportunity, and inequality in America and for stimulating fact-based conversations about issues we all care about: health, education and living standards.

### **About the Citi Foundation:**

The Citi Foundation works to promote economic progress in communities around the world and focuses on initiatives that expand financial inclusion. We collaborate with best-in-class partners to create measurable economic improvements that strengthen low-income families and communities. Through a “More than Philanthropy” approach, Citi’s business resources and human capital enhance our philanthropic investments and impact.

**For more information, please visit: [www.opportunitynation.org](http://www.opportunitynation.org), [www.measureofamerica.org](http://www.measureofamerica.org), [www.citigroup.com](http://www.citigroup.com) and [www.citifoundation.com](http://www.citifoundation.com).**

**CONTACT:**

Cara Willis, Director of Communications, Opportunity Nation

978-502-0910

[cwillis@opportunitynation.org](mailto:cwillis@opportunitynation.org)

###