

NEW ERA COLORADO

Background

Young people, and specifically young people of color, have always been at the forefront of progressive movements. We know that when empowered, organized, resourced, and prioritized, young people can and will transform their communities. Right now, the climate crisis, economic inequality and a number of other compounding crises uniquely and disproportionately impact young people, worsening our quality of life and endangering our futures. Each one is rooted directly in white supremacy. Young people are visionary and aren't held back by pessimism or allegiance to the way things are, or have been, and for that reason, we have unparalleled revolutionary potential. We believe young people can and will give life to the world we dream of.

That world looks like:

- An abundance of shared resources where every person's basic needs are met, and we all have equitable access
- Caring for the land and environment and acknowledging that it is part of us
- All people are treated with dignity and safety so we can show up as our authentic selves
- Connection between generations, combining the power of young people's possibility-thinking with the wisdom of our elders
- Wellness in our minds, bodies, and souls
- Having the resources we need to make informed, self-determined decisions about our lives and bodies, with consistent respect for the decisions that we make
- Space for healing, creativity, and joy
- Systems of oppression are dismantled and replaced with systems of care and accountability

One way to achieve that vision of the world is through progressive policymaking. The Youth Agenda Policy Platform is the framework by which we will fight for progress on the issues that impact our generation. We chose these issues and policies based on our 2021 Youth Agenda Listening Tour where we talked to over 1,200 young people across the state about their vision for Colorado and the issues that most matter to them, prioritizing the responses of BIPOC and QTPOC young people in our platform. New Era will not take the lead on all of these issues—we are lucky to have incredible partners leading the specific policy and organizing work on many of these issues. However, we will

take more of a forward stance on the following Youth Agenda issues:

- Climate
- Higher Education and Student Debt
- Reproductive Rights
- Democracy Reform
- Economic Justice

The Youth Agenda Policy Platform

Central Frame: Racial Justice

The top issue for young people is racial justice. We define racial justice as the elimination of systemic racism, especially anti-Blackness, and the implementation of systems that support communities of color to thrive. Racial justice is not a single issue area, but rather intersectional, which means we must use an anti-racist lens to approach every issue in this platform by prioritizing the experiences of people of color and advocating for policies that protect the health and safety of Black and brown communities while fighting against racism as it shows up in all of our systems, (e.g. criminal justice and policing systems, economic systems, electoral systems).

A racial justice lens also means that we take an abolitionist stance, which is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Abolition means that we work to create systems of care, accountability, and transformative justice that allow individuals to heal and repair, rather than relying on failed systems of punishment and surveillance that leave communities more vulnerable and often do not solve the root causes of crime.

Anti-racism is the foundation for the entire YAPP, which means that all of the policies listed here must be proved to achieve racial justice and actively eliminate racial inequity in our society.

(1) Climate Justice

We define this as protecting our land, water and air, as well as dismantling historically racist policies that have disproportionately impacted the health and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Young people demand we:

- Hold corporations and government accountable for moving towards sustainable energy solutions, reducing pollutants, and reversing racist environmental policies that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander and Latine/x communities in Colorado
- Address environmental racism head-on by supporting and presenting policies that

create, equitable access to clean air, water, land, jobs and healthy homes for communities of color and low-income communities – this includes undoing historically racist zoning codes

- Divest from fossil fuels and a transition to a renewable economy
- Support the public in owning our public utilities through municipalization efforts or otherwise
- Fight the global climate crisis on a systemic level, rather than individually, so that our earth is a safe place to live for generations to come.

(2) Reproductive Rights

We define reproductive rights as the ability to make autonomous decisions for your reproductive health, free from fear or stigma, and with dignity and support. We approach reproductive rights work through a reproductive justice framework, centering people of color, especially Black and Indigenous women and femmes, and Trans Indigenous and Black folk, and destigmatizing abortion through an intersectional lens

Young people demand that we:

- Protect the right to parent or not parent, and parent children in safe, healthy environments without fear of violence.
- Protect the right to express gender and sexuality freely.
- Advance bold and out loud advocacy for reproductive rights, including abortion, through empowering, inclusive and anti-racist language.
- Continue to protect and expand abortion access – including eliminating deceptive Anti-Abortion Counseling Centers
- Eliminate barriers to receiving abortions, including the state funding ban and parental notification
- Provide comprehensive sex and reproductive health education, and equitable access to all forms of reproductive and gender affirming healthcare.
- Address other barriers to reproductive rights, intersectional with economic justice, climate, healthcare, criminal justice, etc.

(3) Higher Education & Student Debt

We define access to higher education as the ability for everyone to access post-secondary learning, regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, gender, or citizenship. Higher education is a public good and should be publicly-funded, meaning debt-free.

Young people demand that we:

- Fight for affordability of higher education by lowering tuition, ultimately building toward a vision of debt-free college
- Cancel all student loan debt
- Implement protections for student loan borrowers, including holding the predatory servicing industry accountable and creating stronger accountability mechanisms
- Improve education and access to scholarships and federal/state aid

- Educate and support young people in accessing federal and state financial aid
- Break down other non-financial barriers, such as mental health support and language accessibility, throughout the application process and in the classroom

(4) Economic Justice

We define economic justice as the ability for everyone to have financial stability and safety regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, or income. We believe it is time for the wealthy and corporations to pay what they owe in taxes so we can all have our basic needs met through a strong social infrastructure.

Young people demand that we:

- Implement progressive tax policies that require wealthy corporations and individuals to pay what they owe.
- Provide affordable and accessible housing for all – including housing-first policies, land grants, and rent control.
- Improve funding for public goods and services like education and Medicaid
- Lower the barriers to access social safety net programs like tax credits, welfare, public housing, and free lunches.
- Provide reparations now to Black and Indigenous folks
- Repeal TABOR, Colorado's broken tax code, and replace it with a progressive and anti-racist tax code
- Support and advocate for unions and labor organizations fighting for worker's justice

(5) Democracy Reform

We define this as equitable access to our democracy, at every level, regardless of identity. It also means democracy reform so that the system better represents the needs of the people, especially marginalized communities. In order to ensure voter enfranchisement (especially for young people), direct voter education and registration are important. Alongside this direct work, there must be policies that continue to increase access to voting for every community in our state.

Young people demand that we:

- Ensure access to the political process for our most marginalized communities
- Continue to serve as a gold standard for election access in the country, with equal access to polling places, early voting, and multiple ways to cast your ballot
- Continue to improve our automatic voter registration system to increase access for Black, Indigenous, Latine/x, other communities of color and low-income voters, and first time voters
- Defend against disinformation and anti-democracy efforts
- Get corporate money out of politics and limit the influence of wealthy individuals and corporations on our representation
- Maximize political representation and power for young people and Black, Indigenous, Latine/x folks and communities of color

(6) Health care & Mental Health

We define health care as access to resources that allow us to thrive in our physical and mental health. Mental health is particularly important to young people. We define mental health as the mental wellbeing of our communities, as well as equitable access to support for mental illness and trauma, especially as it relates to systemic oppression.

Young people demand that we:

- Create a universal health care system where we all have equitable access to high-quality healthcare services
- Make medical school more accessible and affordable for all, reducing the provider shortage in Colorado
- Get profit as a motive out of health care
- Provide community-focused care for communities of color, and in particular Black, Latinex, and Indigenous folks
- Have affordable access to all forms of therapy and mental health support in K-12 schools
- Support victims and survivors of trauma
- Addressing the root causes of mental health challenges, including racism, economic injustice, and the climate crisis

(7) Education

We define education as both having equitable access to high-quality public education at all levels, and support within the education system, regardless of identity. We support our public schooling system and believe the individuals working within that system deserve dignity and respect, financially and otherwise.

Young people demand that we:

- Fund our public schools with sufficient public dollars through a progressive tax system
- Support employees within the education system, including funding for teachers and higher education adjunct professors
- Actively support public schools and teacher unions
- Ensure culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy for Black, Indigenous, Latine/x, other communities of color, and LGBTQ+ students
- Ensure safe and welcoming schools that have adequate mental health resources to support social and emotional well-being

(8) LGBTQ Rights and Gender Expression

We define this as the ability for everyone, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, to live a safe and healthy life, without fear of discrimination or violence.

Young people demand that we:

- Protect and uplift trans communities

- Provide gender affirming care in schools
- Protect marriage equality and equal protection under the law
- Create policies that ensure students right to privacy for personal identities or clubs they engage in in high schools
- Ensure comprehensive sex education applies to LGBTQ+ communities
- Create equitable access to healthcare for LGBTQ+ communities

(9) Immigrant Rights

We define this as the ability to live a safe and healthy life, regardless of your immigration status, as well as providing specific support to immigrant communities.

Young people demand that we:

- Reform immigration policies and create a rapid pathways to citizenship
- Protect DACA
- Ensure access to economic programs including higher education, financial aid, and healthcare
- Abolish ICE

(10) Criminal Justice

We define this as a reimagining of our criminal justice so that it actually fosters justice, healing, and restitution. As designed, our criminal justice system only further entrenches harm, generational trauma, and does not achieve justice nor fairness. We take an abolitionist stance toward criminal justice, where we believe the root causes of crime lie at the socioeconomic level, not addressed through individual punishment and surveillance.

Young people demand that we:

- Abolish the police and carceral system, replacing it with systems of community care, economic justice, and mental health services to solve at the root causes of crime
- Expand access to the political process for folks with criminal backgrounds
- Reform the juvenile justice system
- Create alternatives to jail like restorative or transformative justice
- Expand alternatives to policing, like community support and mental health services
- End cash bail