Building lasting youth power to fight for dignity and humanity
In 2020, we saw election results in Colorado like we have never seen before. The people have spoken: but more importantly, young people have spoken. **Young adults ages 18-34 turned out at record levels across the country, most notably here in Colorado** where early results show young people turned out at 70% and made up 27% of the vote share. Youth turnout is 9 percentage points higher than the last presidential election and our vote share makes us the largest voting bloc in the state.

Young people defied all the odds—a global pandemic, disinformation, intimidation at the polls—and made their voices heard at the ballot box. Yet, young people did not turn out for a political party or a candidate: we turned out for our future.

We came of age during the Occupy Wallstreet movement while many of our families were suffering economic ruin from the 2008 recession; we realized our power through **movements for justice**, with young Black activists leading the Movement for Black Lives and the young Parkland students leading the March for our Lives. We’ve watched our planet burn while corporations get richer; we see our communities suffering from a global pandemic without healthcare, child care, nor a social safety net to hold us in place.

Throughout history, young people have been the first to call out injustice, the first to demand change. Now, it’s time for our elected officials and our elders to listen earnestly and take action with intention. We have a mandate to center the youth agenda: COVID recovery, climate change, abortion rights, student debt, economic justice—and racial justice as a central principle for how we address all other issues. Our country is in desperate need of reimagining itself. 2020 brought a global pandemic, an economic recession, destructive wildfires, and national cries for racial justice. **Now is the time for our country and our state to rebuild anew and live up to its founding ideals of justice and equality.** And young people—we’re the ones to reimagine our future.

Next year, New Era Colorado will embark on a statewide listening tour to hear young people’s vision for the world and for Colorado. We will use this visioning process to shape and move forward the Youth Agenda: a roadmap for how we rebuild our social contract with love, justice, and equality at the center. We will continue to connect young people’s vote to the issues they care about by centering student debt reform in the state legislature and giving young people a platform at the capitol. New Era will organize young people, year after year, as a political home for young people until we achieve the vision of the world we want to create.

It’s time to pass the mic to the next generation, and let us design the solutions to the problems we are inheriting. This election, we chose us—and now, we choose our future.

Onward,

Nicole Hensel
Executive Director
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Who We Are

In 2020, our north star was to build lasting youth power towards a Colorado that fights for the dignity and humanity of all people.

We ensure our generation has the political power to move Colorado toward a more just future.
What We Do

Civic Engagement

As the largest young voter mobilization organization in Colorado, and one of the most effective in the country, we’ve helped bring about a new era of political engagement for our generation. We’ve registered more than 220,000 young voters since our founding and we turn those voters out in droves because we know that when young people show up, we vote for a better future. In fact, our efforts have helped Colorado achieve some of the highest youth voter turnout rates in the nation—and the voters we registered turn out at rates as high as 86%. By doing this all year, every year—for elections big and small—we’re building a new generation of voters and leaders who will shape our democracy for decades to come.
We’re taking on the biggest issues facing our generation—and when we win, we build a better Colorado for everyone. Through our efforts we’ve passed some of the best pro-voter laws in the country, protections for student loan borrowers, and innovative climate policies.

The people most impacted by decisions made in the halls of the Capitol—young people, LGBTQ people, Black and Brown people, lower-income people—have long been excluded from the conversation. Through our advocacy program, we uplift our diverse and progressive generation and center the youth agenda in the minds of our elected leaders. Those most impacted by our state’s policies should be the ones dictating the conversation if we hope to build toward a more just future.

**Core Issues**

**Climate:** We know climate change is an existential crisis that demands urgent action, so we work at every level of government to reduce carbon emissions and protect our planet.

**Economic justice & student debt:** We know that our economy should work for all of us, not just the wealthy, so we pass policies to make college affordable and make sure everyone lives a life of dignity.

**Abortion rights:** We know that bodily autonomy is a basic right, so we fight shame and stigma around abortion.

**Election access:** We know that our democracy is stronger when we all participate, so we tear down barriers to access.
Our generation is leading a massive political movement to take charge of our own future. Whether it’s at the polls, at the capitol, or in the streets, we move our country forward with the example of our leadership. At New Era, we build the power of young people across the state to organize their peers, lead a team to victory, and fight for bold policies that will protect and uplift our communities. We’ve trained hundreds of young leaders since we were founded, and now watch with pride as they serve at all levels of government in the state, run campaigns and strategy at our partner organizations, work alongside incredible elected officials, and so much more.
New Era Colorado is founded at CU Boulder by Joe Neguse, Leslie Herod, Lisa Kauffman, and Steve Fenberg.

The first Vote F*cker button is designed, instantly becoming a timeless momento.

We help launch The Bus Federation (now known as the Alliance for Youth Action), the network of state-based grassroots organizations building youth power.

Online voter registration passes (with critical support from New Era), making Colorado the 4th state in the country to expand registration access online.

We host our first ever Opening Day Happy Hour and launch our first Fort Collins office.

In Boulder, voters pass 2B & 2C to pursue a greener, locally-owned electric utility. Thanks to New Era, young voter turnout doubles compared to previous municipal elections.

We run the first ever National Voter Registration Day, started by the Alliance for Youth Action.

New Era writes and helps pass a major voter access bill, including voter pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds and same-day voter registration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Young voter turnout increases by 10 points from 2010 to 2014, likely due to election access expansions from the 2013 legislation.</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>We launch our high school registration program, The Colorado Democracy Challenge, piloting it in Denver and Jefferson counties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>New Era turns out registrants at whopping 82%, 21 points higher than statewide youth turnout at 61%.</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>The Brazen Project, our abortion rights organizing program, launches on CU Boulder and Auraria’s campuses, later expanding to Colorado State University.</td>
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<td>2018</td>
<td>Youth turnout surges in the midterm election, with more people under the age of 40 voting than those over the age of 60.</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>New Era passes a student debt reform bill regulating public loan servicers and creating a watchdog in the Attorney General’s office. We also help pass the Colorado Votes Act—winning major expansions for young voters like automatic voter registration and guaranteed campus voting centers and dropboxes.</td>
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| 2020 | 1. Despite the global pandemic and fueled by national racial uprisings, young people turn out to vote at HISTORIC rates with with 86% of New Era registrants voting and statewide youth turnout at 70%. Young people officially become the largest voting bloc in Colorado with 27% of the vote share.  
2. We organize young people to defeat a backdoor abortion ban, Prop 115, turning out 95% of our supporters to protect abortion access. |
2020 in Review: Building Lasting Youth Power

Despite a global pandemic, we were able to do what we do best—meet young people where they’re at, break through the noise as a trusted messenger, and mobilize them to vote in record numbers. We adapted our programs and strategies in light of the pandemic, yet stayed focused on our north star: to build lasting youth power towards a Colorado that fights for dignity and humanity of all people.

1 We Drove Record Turnout

Young Coloradans shattered records during the 2020 election, turning out at historic rates and cementing their place as the largest voting bloc in the state. We met young people where they were at and mobilized them to vote their values down ballot.

We ran a scaled voter registration and engagement program in 16 counties across the state to ensure that young Coloradans had everything they needed to vote. We registered 33,020 new voters this cycle and stayed with them until they cast their ballot, turning them out for both primary elections and the general election. It’s clear that the work we’ve done to expand access to voter registration and voting on college campuses is lifting up the entire youth vote by making our elections more accessible.

Let My People Vote

We collaborated with Soul 2 Soul Sisters on a campaign to educate, mobilize, and build a political home for young Black people in Colorado in order to create permanent power through civic engagement and issue advocacy. In 2020 we registered young Black folx across Colorado to vote and recruited Ambassadors for our relational organizing program. Through this program, we turned out young Black people in our registrant universe at 74% this election.
We soundly defeated Proposition 115 (with an 18-point margin), delivering a strong, clear message that our state will continue to protect abortion access. This year, our organizers worked hard to educate, persuade, and identify supporters of abortions later in pregnancy, building an active base of young people to mobilize. In fact, 95% of the 18-34 year olds who we ID’d in support of abortion later in pregnancy turned out to defeat the abortion ban.

In March, we pivoted our work to reconnect with our base in light of the pandemic. We made calls to check in with young people, providing resources for them to protect themselves and their loved ones from the impacts of COVID-19 on their health—physical, mental, and financial (with a focus on student debt relief). In organizing, trust is your greatest currency.

We also piloted new strategies like:
1. Virtual voter registration workshops
2. Relational organizing
3. Vote tripling
4. More targeted digital ads

All the while focusing on staff wellbeing, mutual aid, and increased sick time policy.

We organized young people in support of key measures at the state legislature, including sweeping police accountability reform, temporary suspension of debt collection, and paid sick days. Our abortion rights organizing expanded this year to defeat a harmful abortion ban this fall. We also organized in rapid response moments—running a COVID-specific effort to provide resources on student loans, and uplifting the demands of local Black organizers with the Movement for Black Lives in June and July.

We soundly defeated Proposition 115 (with an 18-point margin), delivering a strong, clear message that our state will continue to protect abortion access. This year, our organizers worked hard to educate, persuade, and identify supporters of abortions later in pregnancy, building an active base of young people to mobilize. In fact, 95% of the 18-34 year olds who we ID’d in support of abortion later in pregnancy turned out to defeat the abortion ban.

95%
Wins at the Ballot Box

Passed Prop 118, Paid Family Leave, providing a critical support to our communities in the midst of the pandemic.

Passed Prop 113, a step toward a more just future by reaffirming Colorado’s commitment to the National Popular Vote compact.

Defeated Prop 115, a dangerous backdoor abortion ban, by an 18-point margin—delivering a strong, clear message that our state will continue to protect abortion access.

Passed Colorado SB20-211 at the legislature at the legislature, limiting extraordinary debt collection during the pandemic.

3 We Built Lasting Youth Power

Despite our wins, multiple measures passed in Colorado that deepen racial inequality and harmfully impact our communities. There’s so much more work to do, and we’re continuing to organize. Immediately following the election, we launched an organizing effort to connect young people to our issue campaigns and center the youth agenda in the minds of newly elected leaders. This long-term power building work is why we’re so effective in election years: we don’t pack up and leave like most campaigns, we’re in it for the long run, building an independent political home for young Coloradans.

Election Protection & Implementation

We implemented the policies of the 2019 Colorado Votes Act, including the provision allowing 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections. Ahead of the presidential primary in March, we ran a campaign registering and turning out 17 year-olds at 44% in the primary, compared to 45.5% statewide turnout for all ages—an incredible feat for this group of first-time voters.

Equity Statement

We named our failures and asked our community to hold us accountable on our organizational anti-racism journey, releasing a public equity statement. At New Era, we believe that centering anti-racism is the only way to attain liberation for all. The intentional, deep integration of racism in our country’s institutions, policies, communities, and individuals requires that the move toward justice and liberation begins by tackling white supremacy. Now, we’re engaging in a strategic planning process to weave anti-racism into the DNA of our organization.
Wins by the Numbers

370,481 voter turnout calls

50,912 texts sent

3,014 doors knocked safely

286,079 voter guides distributed (10 versions targeting key races)

33,020 new voters registered this cycle

54 school visits (virtual and in-person pre COVID)

377 virtual workshops for voter registration and turnout

62 Full time staff

764 grubhub orders

82 Part time staff

108 pairs of blue light glasses bought for staff

584 grassroots donors
Reimagining Our Future: 2021 and Beyond

This election is just one moment in a movement towards a more just future. Young people turned out this election and made their voices heard on the greatest issues our country face, and the challenges we will inherit. This historic turnout creates a mandate to center the youth agenda in our work and in the minds of our elected officials. One thing is clear this election: young people have spoken, especially young People of Color—and now, it’s time to follow their lead.

2021 Priorities

1. Co-creating a new strategic plan, that must be:
   • Community-centered and youth-driven, through a statewide listening tour that aims to center the experiences of young people, especially young BIPOC people, in our new strategic vision
   • Anti-racist in its design and intention by rebuilding our policies, program, and practices anew

2. Create a mandate for the youth agenda by:
   • Passing student debt relief in the state legislature by regulating predatory private loan servicers, stopping harmful debt practices, & expanding financial literacy standards
   • Limiting anti-abortion counseling centers’ access to campuses to combat abortion stigma
   • Continuing to improve and modernize Colorado’s election system to expand voter access and enfranchisement

3. Expand the electorate by:
   • Continuing voter registration at high schools and expanding partnerships with community colleges to reach more BIPOC youth across the state

And through everything, we’re focused on building youth power, and an independent political home for Colorado’s young people.