

Youth
Civic
Challenge



Youth Civic Challenge Engagement Course | 2026



OUR APPROACH

Civics, defined broadly, is about people working together to common ends.

Youth Civic Challenge (YC²) introduces students to civic leadership through collaboration, strategic thinking tools, and hands-on exploration of community issues. The program helps young people develop their civic voice by encouraging them to question assumptions, understand how systems work, and work together to design meaningful projects that can improve their communities.

YC² visited Safe-Hub Philadelphia in Kensington on March 6 and 7 to host a demonstration workshop for Safe-Hub staff and their high school Playmakers. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the YC² framework and provide a preview of how the four-week summer program will operate.

The workshop centered on teamwork, community exploration, and creative thinking through the twelve lenses of thinking and the LEGO® Serious Play method.



ROADMAP

The YC² team began their visit on March 6 by working with the Safe-Hub Philadelphia staff. This session provided a demonstration of the YC² methodology and allowed staff to experience the process that the Playmakers would later go through themselves.

Through discussion and hands-on activities, staff were able to see how YC² helps participants develop leadership skills, explore civic challenges, and begin imagining projects that can positively impact their communities. The session demonstrated that the YC² approach works across age groups and encourages people to think creatively about how change can happen locally.

The main workshop took place on March 7, when the YC² team worked directly with Safe-Hub's group of high school Playmakers.

Jerry Eisterhold introduced participants to the twelve lenses of thinking, a set of strategic thinking tools designed to help students approach problems from multiple perspectives and develop stronger critical thinking skills.

Mark Hansen and Lydia Bird then led students through the LEGO® Serious Play exercises, guiding participants through a series of builds designed to explore identity, community, and systems.



TEAMBUILDING

The session began with two short practice builds that helped participants become comfortable with the LEGO process and encouraged collaboration within the group. These early exercises created an atmosphere where students felt comfortable sharing ideas, experimenting with models, and listening to one another's perspectives. The activity also highlighted the different skills and approaches students bring to a group setting.



COMMUNITY EXPLORATION

After the introductory exercises, the Playmakers moved into a series of structured builds that explored their personal experiences and their understanding of the Kensington community.

BUILD 1: BUILD YOURSELF IN KENSINGTON

Students created models representing themselves and the experiences that shaped who they are today. The activity encouraged participants to reflect on their identities and how their personal stories connect to the community around them.

BUILD 2: KENSINGTON FROM THE OUTSIDE AND FROM THE INSIDE

Students built two contrasting ideas. One model represented how Kensington is often described by people outside the community, while the second represented how it actually feels to live there.

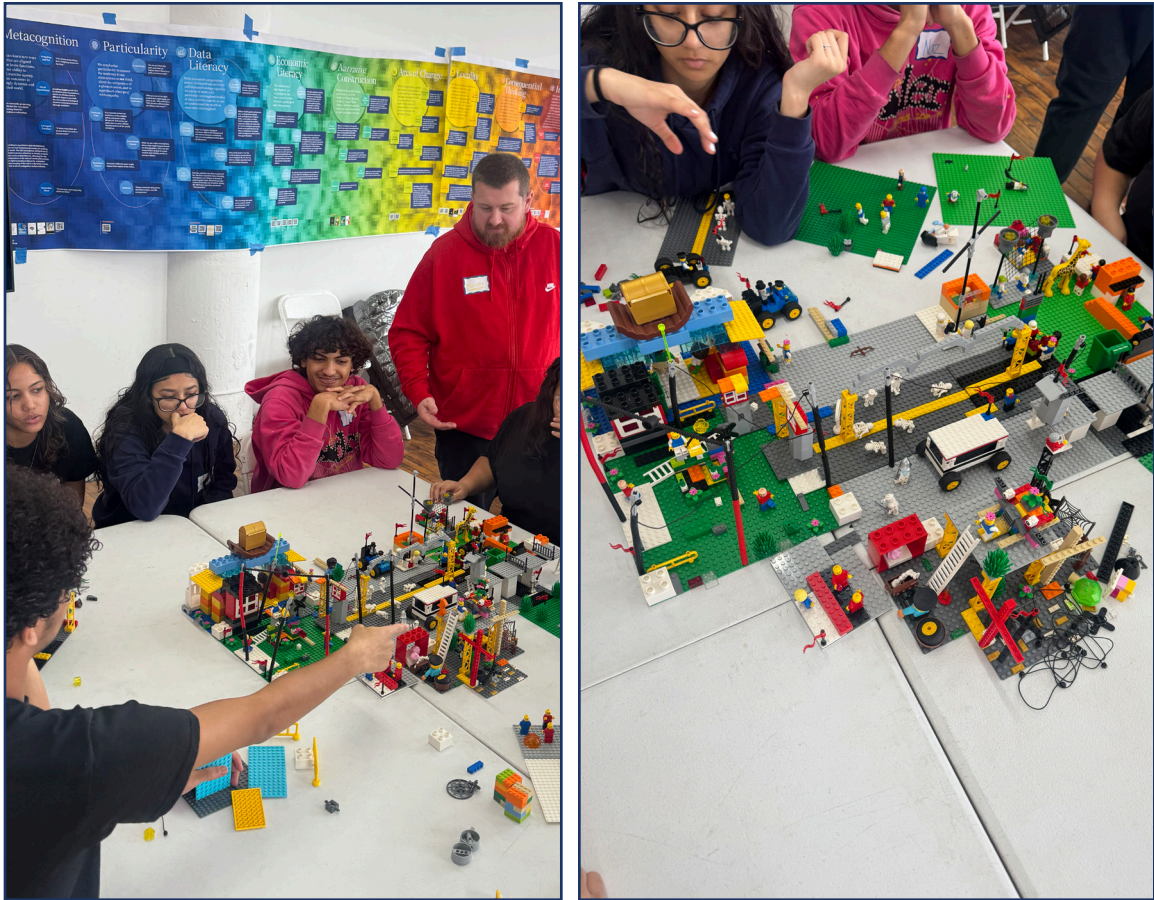
This exercise sparked thoughtful and honest discussion among the Playmakers. Students were able to dive deeper into their own experiences, sharing how they view their neighborhood and what it means to them personally. The activity highlighted the difference between outside perceptions and the lived experiences of the people who call Kensington home and encouraged participants to speak openly about both the strengths of their community and the challenges they hope to address.



SYSTEMS THINKING

In the next stage, students expanded their models to include systems that affect their lives and communities. Participants explored how institutions, local resources, and social structures shape everyday experiences in Kensington.

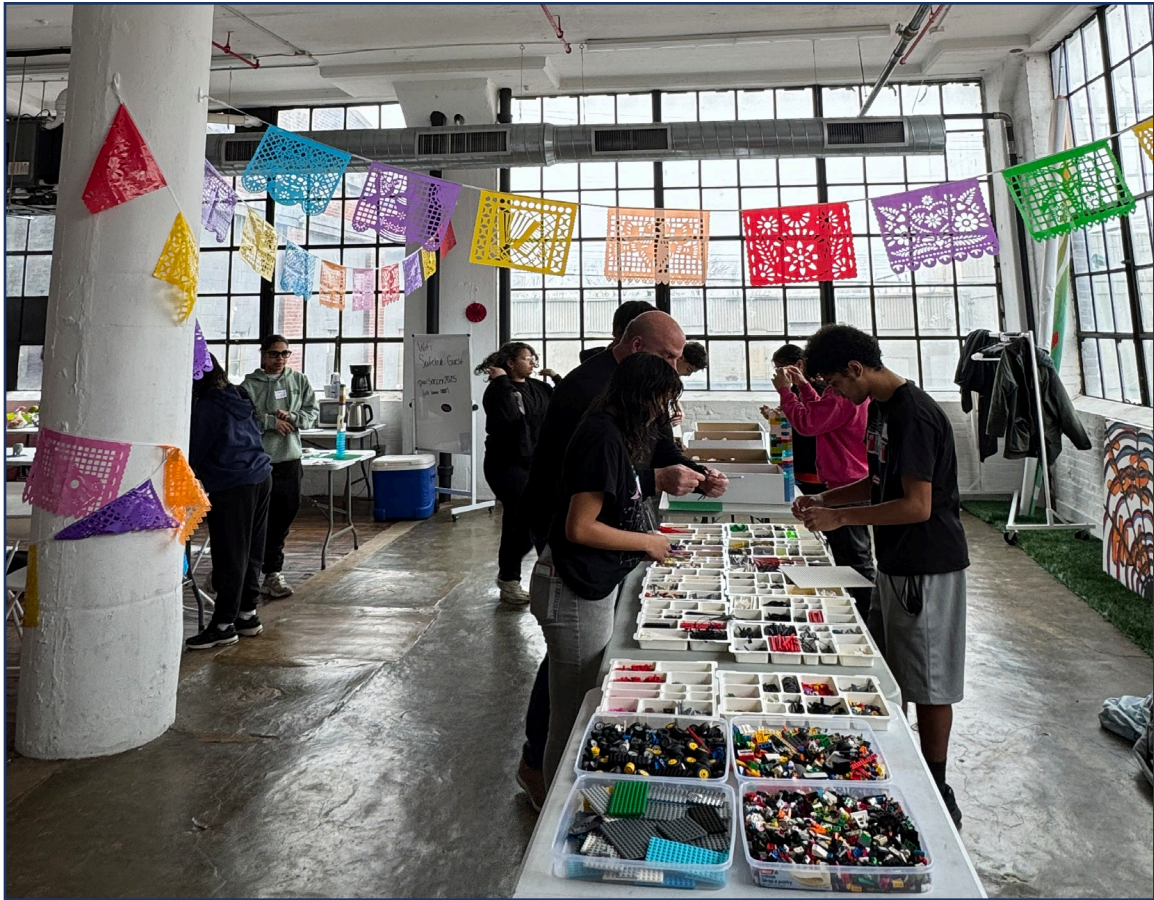
This exercise encouraged students to think critically about where improvements could be made and how those changes might happen. It also sparked early ideas about potential community projects, helping Playmakers begin connecting their experiences and observations to meaningful actions they could pursue through the YC² program.



COLLABORATIVE BUILD

One of the most powerful moments of the session came when the Playmakers were asked to merge their individual models together into a shared model of Kensington. This required students to collaborate, negotiate ideas, and determine which elements were most important to represent in the final model. Each participant had the opportunity to explain the meaning behind their build and advocate for what mattered most to them.

The process emphasized teamwork and communication and ensured that every participant's voice contributed to the final model.

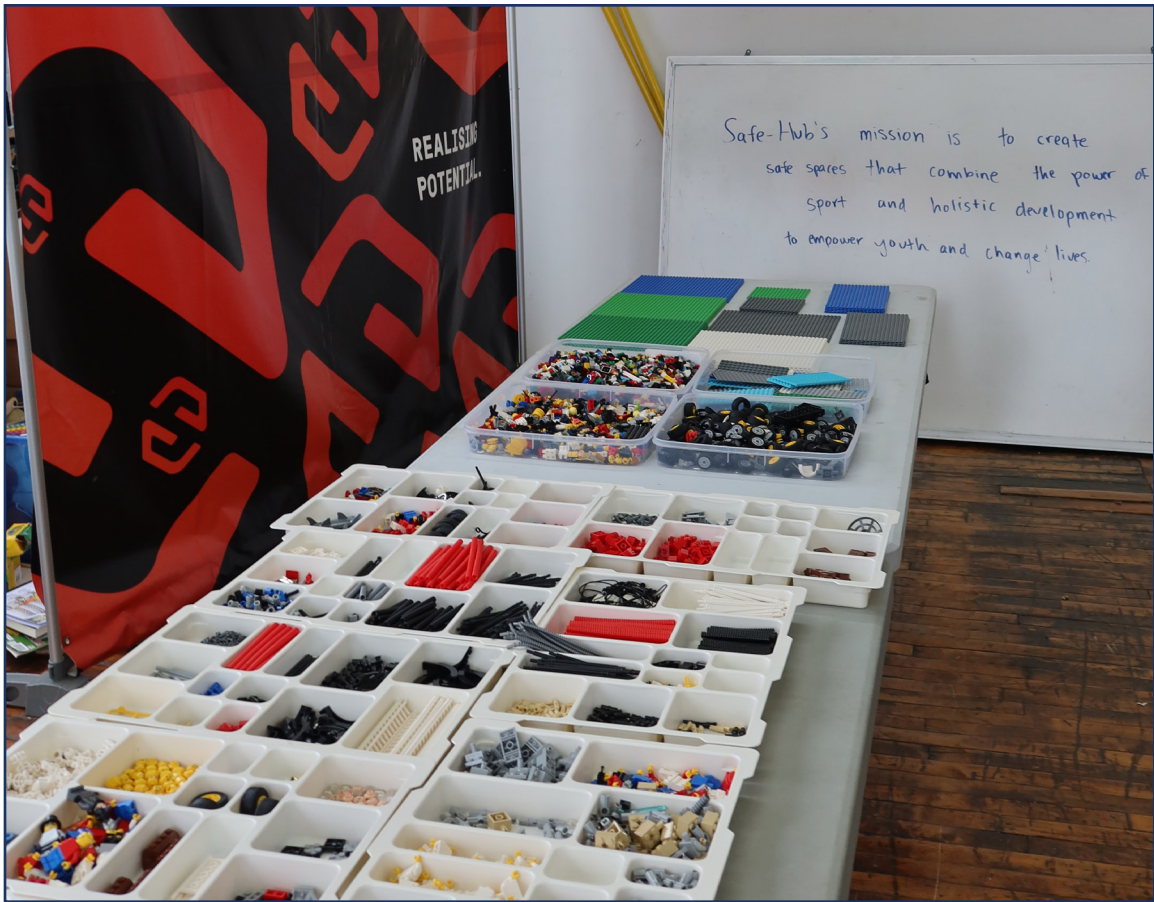


FUTURE VISION

In the final build, students were asked to imagine Kensington ten years from now. The discussion focused on questions such as:

- What is worth protecting?
- What are we willing to invest in?
- What matters more than being right?

Through these conversations, students began identifying themes and early ideas for the types of community projects they might pursue during the YC² summer program.



CONCLUSION

The YC² demonstration at Safe-Hub Philadelphia provided an exciting introduction to the program and its potential impact.

Through collaborative exercises and open discussion, the Playmakers explored their identities, their community, and the systems that shape their everyday lives. By the end of the workshop, students had begun thinking about possible projects and the types of changes they hope to pursue.

Safe-Hub Philadelphia is an extraordinary organization that empowers young people to grow as leaders within their communities. The creativity, energy, and commitment shown by the Playmakers during the demonstration suggest tremendous potential for the YC² program this summer.