

FAQs



Youth Coalition Fall 2026: ReThinking Democracy in the Age of AI Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Have a question that isn't answered here? Reach out to Youth Coalition Program Manager Marrow at marrow.woods@rethinkcitizens.org.

About the Program

★ What is the [ReThink Citizens Youth Coalition \(RCYC\)](#)?

The RCYC is an initiative of ReThink Citizens, a nonprofit dedicated to educating and empowering today's youth to build the internet they deserve. We launched the RCYC because we believe every young person with a bold idea to make the internet better deserves a community, a set of tools, and a space to pursue it – regardless of their background, resources, or connections.

★ What is the **RCYC Innovator Academy**?

The Innovator Academy is an **8-week virtual incubator** where young digital changemakers explore the systems behind the digital harms they've experienced or observed, develop a solution or project in response, and share their work with peers, mentors, and leaders in responsible technology. Participants walk away with new skills, meaningful connections, and momentum to keep building long after the program ends.

All participants who successfully complete the program receive a program participation stipend: \$500 for Youth Innovators and \$750 for Youth Leaders.

★ What is this cycle's theme?

This cohort's theme is **ReThinking Democracy in the Age of AI**. As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, AI and algorithmic systems are increasingly shaping democratic participation and citizenship. This cycle, we're inviting young changemakers to examine the status quo, imagine better alternatives, and ultimately build solutions that ensure AI strengthens, rather than weakens, democracy.

★ What are the two pathways for participation?

- **Youth Innovators:** Middle schoolers through college students who want to build (or further develop) a project that improves the digital world. They participate in



all program sessions, work on their projects over the 8 weeks, and present their work at the final Showcase.

- **Youth Leaders:** College students and recent graduates (**25 or under**) who want to take on a dual role: building their own projects while also serving as skills-based mentors.
 - They bring valuable additional perspective to the program by sharing their skills (such as public speaking, research, coding, design, or community organizing) and supporting cohort-wide discussion, collaboration, and community-building.

★ **What kinds of projects have past Coalition members developed?**

There's no single template for a Coalition project. Past members have developed apps and browser extensions, campaigns and curricula, storytelling projects and policy frameworks – all built around a shared conviction that the digital world can and should be better.

★ **Is this program virtual?**

Yes. The Innovator Academy is fully virtual, including the culminating Showcase. All sessions take place on Zoom, with independent project work completed between meetings. This structure is designed to be **manageable alongside school, work, and other commitments**. Learn more about the program expectations [here!](#)

The showcase on October 29 gives participants the opportunity to share their work with the broader responsible technology community. Our Spring 2026 Showcase featured Girls Who Code CEO Dr. Tarika Barrett as our keynote speaker.

★ **How many Coalition members will be selected?**

We're aiming to select approximately 15 Coalition members for our Fall 2026 cohort.

★ **What do you mean by digital changemaking?**

Digital changemakers are people who use a variety of tools and approaches (technology, advocacy, community-building, etc.) to make the digital world healthier, kinder, safer, more equitable, and more empowering. They believe the internet should



give people agency, not take it away, and they take concrete steps toward building the digital future we deserve.

Eligibility

★ Who is eligible to apply?

Applicants must:

- Be 13-25 (at the start of the program on August 31, 2026)
- Be based in the United States
- Have a valid social security number (SSN)
 - A Social Security Number is required to process your stipend. If you'd prefer to participate in the program without providing an SSN, you're welcome to forfeit the stipend. You will still be able to take part in all other aspects of the program. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Marrow at marrow.woods@rethinkcitizens.org.

★ Can teams apply?

The program is designed for individuals. If you're developing a project with peers, only one person from the team should apply. If accepted, that person would represent the group in the program.

★ Does my project need to be fully developed to apply?

Not at all. We welcome projects at every stage: a brand new idea, something you've been thinking about developing for a while, or an existing initiative you'd like to build on. What matters most is your commitment to advancing your work over the course of the 8 weeks.

★ If I'm not accepted for this round, are there other ways to get involved?

Yes, we'd love to stay connected! Sign up for our Substack newsletter [here](#) and explore our other initiatives, including our Youth Squad and Digital Wellness Resources, at rethinkcitizens.org.

Application Process

★ When do applications open and close?

Applications open on **Monday, June 22, 2026**. There are two deadlines:



- **Early Decision Deadline:** Friday, July 10th at 11:59pm ET. Apply early and you'll hear from us by late July.
- **Final Deadline:** Friday, July 31st at 11:59pm ET. You'll hear from us with a decision by mid-August.

★ **How do I access the application?**

Start by completing a short eligibility check [here](#) – it takes less than 2 minutes! **If you're eligible, you'll receive a link to the application when applications open on June 22nd.** From there, you're all set to apply! We're excited to learn more about you.

★ **How are applications assessed?**

We review applications holistically. Here's what we're looking for:

- **Your motivation or "why":** What drives you? What draws you to this issue?
- **Your understanding of the issue:** How do you understand the digital harm, challenge, or opportunity you want to address? What feels most important or urgent about it?
- **Your approach or solution:** Why do you think your idea, project, or approach is a meaningful way to respond to this issue?
- **Your plan for the 8 weeks:** How do you hope to use this program to move your work forward? This might include learning new skills, refining your idea, building a prototype, doing research, testing assumptions, or connecting with others.
- **Your vision for a better internet:** How do your experiences, background, or approach shape your hopes for the digital future? How does your project connect to the kind of internet you want to help build?
- **Alignment with our values:** We look for applicants who approach their work with a commitment to equity, collaboration, responsibility, and youth-driven leadership.

★ **Will there be an interview component?**

Some applicants may be invited for a short 30-minute conversation to learn more about their application and project. Not being invited to an interview does not mean you were not accepted. Some applicants are selected based solely on their written application.



Program Expectations

★ What is the time commitment?

Past participants have reported spending approximately 5 hours per week on this program, including live Zoom sessions and independent project work. Coalition members participate in two 90-minute virtual sessions each week over the 8-week program:

- **Wednesday Program Sessions (7:00–8:30pm ET):** Featuring guest speakers from across the responsible technology space
- **Saturday “Learning Labs” (1:30–3:00pm ET):** Youth Coalition-only learning sessions, led by Youth Leaders

In addition to live sessions, participants complete independent work, which includes developing their project, completing short assignments, and sharing progress updates throughout the program. Time commitment may vary depending on each participant’s project and goals.

★ What is expected of Coalition members?

Selected Coalition members commit to:

- Attending weekly Program Sessions and Learning Labs
- Actively developing their project over the 8-week program
- Sharing ongoing progress toward their MVP or solution, including two deliverables during the program (once at the midpoint and once at the end)
- Presenting their work at the final virtual Showcase on October 29th.

For Partners & Educators

★ How can I support/uplift a young person in my network?

Thank you in advance for your support! You can:

- [Share this flyer](#) with young people in your network before the final application deadline of Friday, July 31, 2026.
- [Nominate a specific changemaker](#) you have in mind. Our nomination form takes less than 5 minutes and we’ll reach out to the nominee directly with an invitation to apply.