#Vote16SF Fact Sheet and FAQ’s

**Question: “Why should 16 and 17 year olds be allowed to vote in municipal elections?”**

16-17 year olds can work without limitations on hours, pay taxes, drive cars, and be tried in adult courts. Based on the civic responsibilities that accrue at age 16--and as people who use public services and are affected by government decisions--16-17 year olds deserve a say in how government is run.

San Francisco has an aging electorate and has increasingly been losing families over the last two decades. We need young people to be directly engaged in crafting solutions for our city. Extending the vote to 16 and 17 year olds will be a positive investment in their civic and political development as lifelong voters and engaged citizens. Our democracy is stronger when more people are at the table!

**Question: “Isn’t there already poor turnout among young voters? Wouldn’t we just be wasting our time allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote?”**

Extending voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds is an important investment in their civic and political development. Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds will mean more people can cast their first vote in a community where they have roots, are enrolled in school, where their parents are voters, and where they may be more interested in voting than those just two years older. And once they vote, they are likely to keep voting! By allowing citizens to cast their first vote after turning 16, cities can increase voter turnout in both the short- and long-term.

Research shows that:

- Voting is habitual. Once someone casts their first vote, they will continue voting.¹
- The earlier someone starts voting, the more likely they are to be a lifelong voter.²
- When given the chance to vote, 16 and 17 year olds register and turn out at greater rates than older voters. This has been seen in other countries that allow teens to vote (Norway Germany, Argentina, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil, and Austria). It

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was also true in Chicago’s 2014 primary and in Takoma Park, MD, where 16 and 17 year olds had a four times greater turnout rate than older voters.³

- Many young people encounter major transitions at age 18, which can make it a challenging year to establish new voting habits. As a result, voter turnout among eligible voters under 30 is lower than any other group.

**Question: “Are teens ready to vote? Will they really understand the issues?”**

16 and 17 year olds are absolutely capable of understanding politics. The high school classroom is the perfect place to engage and inform young people on local municipal issues. Expanding the vote to 16 and 17 year olds will be an opportunity to promote an even deeper engagement with the outstanding civics curriculum in our schools.

Research shows that:

- 16-year-olds’ political knowledge is about the same as 21-year-olds’ and quite close to the average for all adults.⁴
- Neurologically, 16 and 17 year olds have developed the ability to logically analyze information and make responsible voting choices.⁵

**Question: “Can teens really vote independently? Won’t they just vote the same as their parents?”**

16 and 17 year olds absolutely have independent ideas. The dialogue that families will engage in if 16-17 year olds vote will lead to a more informed and engaged electorate overall.

Research shows that:

- 16 and 17 year olds can and do vote independently from their parents. In the Scottish independence referendum, 44% of teens voted differently than their parents.⁶
- There is a “trickle up” effect on civic participation. When 16 and 17 year olds engage in civics, conversations about politics and civic life are brought home, with a positive effect on voter turnout for parents and family members of all ages.⁷

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⁵ Ibid.
