



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Spark Change Day Returns to Texas Capitol, Empowers Girls and Youth Seeking Change Through Advocacy

*Curriculum censorship, gender equity, LGBTQIA+ and more on the agenda*

AUSTIN, Texas – May 3, 2022 – [Spark Change Day](#) is a day-long advocacy event for Texas youth in grades 6 – 12 to learn about civic engagement and how they can raise their voices to bring about positive change for issues they care about. Jointly held by the Excellence & Advancement Foundation and Girls Empowerment Network, the in-person event will be held on Saturday, May 14, 2022, from 10am – 4pm at the Texas Capitol. Pre-registration is required.

The event agenda includes:

- seminars on the power of advocacy
- small group sessions and activities exploring issues youth are facing
- an impactful panel discussion with female changemakers, policymakers and advocates
- Advocacy Power Chats—small group discussions between youth and female adult role models

Small group sessions led by [teenage Spark Change Project staff](#) will lead discussions about mass incarceration, healthcare equity, curriculum censorship in schools, the gender pay gap and LGBTQIA+ community issues.

The panel discussion, moderated by Spark Change Leadership Team Members Adreayn Torrez and Eva Ackerman, will focus on **“The Power and Promise of Youth Advocacy: A Conversation with Female Changemakers.”** The panel will feature women of color who have been successful in seeking justice, equity and change in their communities. Confirmed panelists include the following:

- **Roxanne Lawson**, Co-Executive Director of Programs at [Youth Rise Texas](#), an Austin-based organization serving gender oppressed, BIPOC youth ages 14 – 22 whose parents have been removed from the home due to criminalization, detention or deportation. Through their leadership pipeline, they place youth at the forefront of healing communities, accessing safeguards and rights, and creating the conditions for young people to rise from systems of oppression.
- **Meme Styles**, founded [MEASURE](#) in 2015 to close the gap between the Austin Policy Department’s data reporting and the community. She created a methodology to measure community policing and disparities related to health, education and economics. MEASURE works to empower people impacted by data disparities

and the accompanying narrative to create a common language for the community to work together to create equitable change and increase awareness.

- **Delia Garza** serves as [Travis County's Attorney](#), an elected position that places her in an advisory role for elected officials and gives her the authority to prosecute misdemeanor crimes and seek protective orders. She is working to end mass incarceration for non-violent offenses, reduce racial disparities in our jails, defend immigrant communities, and end the criminalization of poverty. She has a long history of progressive public service and reforming systems. Garza was the first Latina to serve on the Austin City Council and the first Latina to serve as Austin's Mayor Pro Tem.
- **Natasha Harper-Madison** is an [Austin City Councilwoman representing District 1](#), which represents East Austin where she was born and raised. Her upbringing endowed her with an intimate knowledge of her community's strengths and its unique struggles. The lessons she learned as a successful small business owner on the Eastside led her down a path toward advocacy. Her community-level activism sparked Harper-Madison's interest in seeking public office, a goal she achieved with her first campaign for City Council in 2018. In 2020, her colleagues voted to name her mayor pro tem, the second Black woman on Austin City Council to bear the title.

"Giving girls the opportunity to learn about what they stand for and how to enact positive change is a critical life skill for all girls and youth," says Adreayn Torrez, Girls Empowerment Network program manager. "Learning how to advocate for yourself and your community ignites the power in girls and youth to discover their internal belief they can be successful no matter what challenges they face."

Spark Change Day is part of the [Spark Change Project](#), a partnership between Girls Empowerment Network and the Excellence & Advancement Foundation that is now in its second year. Together, the two organizations launched this initiative to center girls of color as leaders in advocacy, to help them discover their activist voices and to galvanize their peers to advocate for positive social change and social justice. High school teen staff employed by the Spark Change Project, who are supported by adult mentors, have been instrumental in designing the agenda for Spark Change Day.

"Inspiring role-models and mentorship connections with trained adult mentors help girls identify their own voices and learn how activism and advocacy can create positive change and healing," says Eva Ackerman, community programs coordinator, Excellence & Advancement Foundation. "Girls and youth will learn how to get involved in their community, learn about career opportunities they might not have considered that advance the cause of social justice, and become more resilient along the way."

Girls and youth in grades 6 – 12 are invited to visit [GirlsEmpowermentNetwork.org](#) and click on [Spark Change Day](#) to register to attend. After registration, attendees will be sent all the event details. The event includes both breakfast and lunch. While donations are appreciated, there is no cost to attend.

**About Girls Empowerment Network - [www.girlsempowermentnetwork.org](http://www.girlsempowermentnetwork.org)**

Through school-based programs, camps, and events, Girls Empowerment Network's mission is to ignite the power in girls by teaching them the skills to thrive and believe in their ability to be unstoppable. Founded in 1996, Girls Empowerment Network envisions a world where all girls believe in their power.

**About Excellence & Advancement Foundation – [www.breakthepipeline.org](http://www.breakthepipeline.org)**

The Excellence and Advancement Foundation is dedicated to disrupting the relationship between race, schooling and incarceration. We support children and their families through our prevention, intervention and advocacy programs.