

With Trendy ‘Hot Girls Vote in N.C.’ Shirts and Brunch Gatherings, N.C. Influence turning civic engagement into a vibrant, social movement amid Election buzz.

Carolina Forward is shaking up North Carolina’s political scene with their bold new program, Influence N.C., designed to spark excitement among young voters. The program's core message: "Meet people where they are." But instead of traditional town halls or speeches, this engagement happens in settings where young people are already gathering and talking—places like brunch spots and cocktail bars.

The launch party for the program took place on October 25th at Velvet Hippo, where the air was buzzing with excitement and energy. Velvet Hippo, a local spot in downtown Durham and has become an integral part of the city's vibrant arts scene. Known for its creative atmosphere and community-oriented spirit, the venue provided the perfect backdrop for a night of meaningful conversations and fresh political ideas.

Hannah Preston, founder of N.C. Influence, and Rebecca Feinglos, co-founder and partial sponsor, hope to engage Gen Z members in bringing in young voters. Preston, who transitioned from public health to politics, explained how they’re using social media and grassroots events to energize Gen Z voters

“We’re trying to be in a lot of fun places — like front clubs, concerts, and tailgates — to get people interested in registering to vote,” Preston said.

As we approach the 2025 local elections, Gen-Z, who are the largest and most diverse group of eligible voters, are hungry for meaningful ways to engage beyond traditional campaigning. Events like these offer a space where political activism feels personal and accessible, away from the usual election-season chaos. Influence N.C. is giving them a place to meet others with shared values, find their political voices, and step into the upcoming election with a sense of empowerment.

Emma Wozniak, who has a large following on Tiktok, shared her excitement about being part of Influence N.C. As someone passionate about connecting young people with politics, she explained how her involvement came about.

“I’m mutual friends with Hannah, and she reached out because she wanted to bring more progressive people together to build a community. I love getting to know more young people in politics,” said Wozniak.

The role of social media in this new wave of civic engagement is undeniable. Kyle Walker, a PhD student at N.C. State, discovered Influence N.C. through TikTok and has been following

Preston's social media journey ever since. For Walker, joining the movement was a way to translate his academic interest in public health into real-world political activism.

"I want to get more involved in health policy and politics in general. Connecting with Hannah was a great way to start getting involved in policy," said Walker.

The event also attracted newcomers like Danna Robles, a recent transplant from Michigan. Robles sees Influence N.C. as an opportunity to meet others committed to advancing progressive policies in a state that will be a key battleground in elections.

"Being from Michigan, I want to meet like-minded and passionate individuals who are looking forward to advancing progressive values in the area," Robles said.

The event wasn't just for political buffs—it was a melting pot of advocates, many of whom are studying Public Health and Policy at Duke University. Emily Ford, a senior at Duke, said the event was the perfect blend of casual and important.

"I started following Hannah on Instagram after she graduated from Gillings," said Emily Ford, a senior at Duke University. "I'm really interested in mental health policy and advocacy, and this event brings all of that together."

This sentiment resonated with other attendees like Eliana Herzog, a senior at Duke, who is also passionate about health policy and politics. For Herzog, this was not just a networking event—it was about building relationships that could lead to real change.

The event's casual vibe and inclusive atmosphere reflected the program's mission: to make political participation accessible, fun, and integral to everyday life. Each attendee received a gift bag, which included stickers, buttons, and a free t-shirt.

"I've been able to feed in the creative outlet and also talk about the gaps in North Carolina when it comes to politics," Preston said.

Preston envisions growing Influence N.C. in the coming years by weaponizing social media as a powerful tool for political engagement. One of her key plans is to establish a social media bootcamp within the organization. This bootcamp will be designed to help elected officials navigate the digital landscape, showing them how to effectively use platforms to connect with voters

"That's where most of us get our news, and we need elected officials to match that energy and be online, too," she said.

With the 2025 local elections and the 2026 midterms on the horizon, and with the stakes higher than ever, programs like Influence N.C. are not just influencing politics—they're making it cool, relevant, and vital to the lives of young voters in North Carolina and beyond.

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