

Power to Decide

February 2025

In the early 1990s, the United States saw a sharp increase in teen pregnancy rates, with variation across different racial and ethnic groups and geographies. [Power to Decide](#), a field catalyst originally known as The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, was founded in response to President Clinton’s 1995 State of the Union address, in which he described teen pregnancy as “[the nation’s] most serious social problem.” Building on this moment of widespread awareness and political momentum, Power to Decide was founded to organize and expand efforts to reduce teen pregnancy, and collaborate across industries to enable effective outreach to teens.

Field Catalyst Role 1 Diagnosing and assessing the core problem and the full landscape of actors devoted to it

Power to Decide helped to illuminate and address the interconnected factors behind teen pregnancy, including gaps in access to contraceptives and cultural and social norms that limited conversation about pregnancy prevention. It coalesced a field of diverse ideologies and approaches, working to redefine teen pregnancy as not just a reproductive health issue, but also an [educational](#), [economic](#), and [child health and well-being](#) issue.

The organization set a measurable goal to reduce teen pregnancy by one-third over a decade, which the field achieved one year early in 2005. At that point, Power to Decide re-assessed the landscape, determined a

FIELD

Teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention

YEARS OF OPERATION

1996 - present

APPROXIMATE ANNUAL EXPENSES

[\\$5M - \\$16M](#) (2024 USD)

KEY IMPACT

Contributed to a [72% decline](#) in birth rates among teens ages 15-19 in the United States between 1991 and 2018

new target for 2015, and decided to expand its scope to include reducing unplanned pregnancies among young adults.

Field Catalyst Role 2 Advocating and shining a spotlight

Since its founding, Power to Decide has partnered with television shows, magazines, and other media outlets to portray relationships, sex, pregnancy, and contraceptive use in ways that allow young adults to reflect on how to handle these situations in their own lives. [Research](#) showed that MTV’s *16 and Pregnant* increased internet searches about birth control and reduced teen births.

This case study was developed collaboratively by Student Experience Research Network and The Bridgespan Group, drawing on The Bridgespan Group’s [research](#) on Power to Decide and the roles and assets of field catalysts, and Power to Decide’s publicly available materials. It is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial NoDerivatives4.0 International License](#).

Power to Decide created policy toolkits that supported state and federal advocates and officials to advance contraceptive access and increase funding for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs. Along with serving as an [expert media advisor](#), Power to Decide organized social media campaigns and produced resources for family and community members to normalize and highlight the importance of meaningful dialogue with teens and young adults about unintended pregnancy prevention.

Field Catalyst Role 3 **Connecting and organizing actors around a shared goal**

Through grassroots organizing with young people, faith communities, and other actors, Power to Decide has disseminated information and contributed to cultural shifts. It worked to promote a specific focus on unintended pregnancy prevention within broader reproductive health efforts, and [engaged actors](#) to meet the needs it observed in the field at different points in time – for example, by launching an initiative in the Latino community with the civil rights organization now known as UnidosUS.

Field Catalyst Role 4 **Filling critical gaps in collective effort**

While it has primarily played an intermediary role, Power to Decide has also engaged in direct service to meet the needs of the field, by developing platforms to provide information about unintended pregnancy prevention directly to users and by building on-the-ground capacity. For example, it offers training for healthcare providers and a framework for colleges to build customized, sustainable systems for supporting students' reproductive health.

[Bedsider](#), an evidence-based birth control information and access network, was launched in 2011 in partnership with Planned Parenthood. Drawing on extensive [user research](#), the website's branding and content are designed to resonate with young adults and facilitate behavior change. It was the first digital intervention [shown to prevent unplanned pregnancy](#).

Ongoing evolution to deliver impact in a changing field

The perspectives of young adults have been central in Power to Decide's work, which has required flexibility in its approach. For example, the organization adapted quickly as teens and young adults began consuming media primarily online.

Adaptability is also crucial in navigating highly politicized issues. When Power to Decide was founded, there was [common ground](#) between welfare reform advocates and proponents of teen pregnancy prevention, and a 1996 bill that restricted benefits to young parents and mandated abstinence education programs had bipartisan support. However, fractures along ideological lines deepened in the mid-2000s once [research](#) showed abstinence-only education to be ineffective.

In 2020, Power to Decide created [AbortionFinder](#). The comprehensive directory helps pregnant individuals find trusted abortion service providers and access medical, emotional, legal, and financial support. Since the national landscape was re-shaped by the Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Power to Decide has leveraged its tools, expertise, and partnerships to continue to play a valued role in protecting reproductive rights.

A multi-faceted strategy

Power to Decide uses a human-centric strategy. To reduce rates of teen and unintended pregnancy, it harmonized action across organizations and sectors, using levers ranging from interpersonal relationships to federal policy. The field catalyst function is characterized by this ability to assess a complex issue and coordinate a coherent response across multiple actors using several approaches at various altitudes.

