

#THINGS2CONSIDER

Creating a Youth Advisory Board

Oct
2016

Youth Advisory Boards (YAB) are created by organizations and initiatives that are seeking structured input from youth. Effective YABs can be valuable in helping to:

1. Improve youth programming and services,
2. Increase youth engagement and outreach.
3. YABs can also identify and facilitate the development of youth-driven projects and informed youth partners (and leaders).

Youth who become involved with a YAB receive benefits like:

- Learning professional skills;
- Building resumes;
- Developing meaningful peer relationships;
- And the opportunity to impact their community in a positive way.

One youth cannot be expected to represent a diverse population of youth. To create a YAB, start with at least 8-10 youth, and a core group of 3-5 young leaders. Having a core group of committed members is a key ingredient in any YAB. Commitment means attending meetings, following through on tasks, leading or participating in discussions, and being willing to put in the time to be successful.

SUPPORTING THE YAB

An organization must provide the necessary training for youth serving on a YAB. This includes orientation as to how advisory input will be used, what partners are involved with the work, what common acronyms mean, and other age-appropriate information to help youth to be knowledgeable advisors and equal partners. Helping them to see the context for the YAB and understanding why the group has been created is key.

An organization can support its YAB by assigning staff to participate in all YAB meetings and by assisting with the administrative duties of the Board. This support helps to coordinate and facilitate the development of a common purpose, and identification of training needs; and helps guide discussions and decisions about the group's projects, goals, and objectives.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

YAB members will have their own unique set of skills and interests to bring to the table. By taking the time to learn about each YAB member, organizations can develop a stronger working relationship which allows them to better understand how youth's lives are changing, what barriers may be preventing consistent involvement, and what additional resources are needed.

To be an informed participant, every new YAB member needs an orientation, and this is best conducted by youth peers. The goal for every YAB is a process that

equally includes young people and adults sharing in the decision making. Many successful YABs were started by adult organizations and later transitioned over time to a YAB that is driven and led by youth members.

KEY DECISIONS IN FORMING A YAB

Roger Hart's Youth Engagement Ladder¹ is a great place to start in measuring the YAB's decision making process. Other considerations include:

1. Resources – Can the youth who are invited to attend arrive by public transportation? Can attendance be online or via conference call? Do youth have the means to communicate between meetings?
2. Compensation – It is recommended to provide youth with some form of compensation for their time and talents (See #Things2Consider: Stipending Youth & Young Adults).
3. Scheduling – YABs can meet weekly, monthly, or quarterly, depending on the group's activity level and available funding, but organizations that want a successful YAB will schedule meetings and activities on weekends and after normal business hours. It is also a good idea to hold meetings in a familiar, welcoming place on a regular schedule.



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1. Source: Roger Hart. Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. UNICEF, 1992. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf