

A GUIDE TO APPLYING YOUTH VOICE



TIPS TO IMPLEMENT YOUTH
VOICE THROUGH A YOUTH
ADVISORY COUNCIL

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Launched in January 2014, the National Mentoring Resource Center is a comprehensive and reliable resource for mentoring tools, program and training materials, and provides no-cost training and technical assistance to youth mentoring programs across the United States. Formed in spring of 2021, the NMRC Youth Advisory Council is currently composed of young leaders who identify as youth mentees and peer mentors that convenes to provide “thought leadership” and guidance on ways to center and elevate youth voice and the mentee experience on the NMRC.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

This guide is designed for organizations that want to involve young voices and input in their practices, activities, and programs. Its aim is to offer tips and recommendations crafted by young people for programs to use to better integrate youth voices and improve youth capacities. The tips and recommendations in this guide may be applicable to general opportunities for youth integration, but primarily this guide focuses on youth voice elevation through a youth advisory council. The guide was developed with input from nine dedicated youth who are committed to improving their communities. This includes four NMRC Youth Advisory Council members and five peer focus group members.

HOW DID WE DEFINE YOUTH VOICE FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

Youth voice is the perspective, opinion, and experience of young people, often within societal, educational, and organizational contexts. Youth voice advocates for the inclusion of young people in impactful decisions aiming to empower them as active participants and leaders in their communities by effecting change!

HOW DO WE DEFINE A YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL? (YAC)

A youth advisory council (YAC) is a platform created to amplify the voices and perspectives of young people within their communities and organizations. They can be composed of individuals typically ranging from teenagers to young adults (16-24) that hold youth leadership positions.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

A Youth Advisory Council (YAC) or similar platform to uplift youth voices has numerous benefits for not just the organization, but also for the youth themselves.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth involvement in leadership positions can develop leadership skills such as effective communication, active listening, and patience. Opportunities to enhance these skills should be incorporated into the council's framework.

TANGIBLE IMPACTS

Being part of a YAC can empower young people to make a tangible impact in their communities. Their perspective and role as council members can help create a more inclusive, engaging, and effective program.

PROGRAM RELEVANCE

By involving young voices in programming, councils can make sure that their programs are responsive to the needs of the community and provide the support that young people genuinely desire, rather than what adults assume they want. This approach enables young people to witness the direct influence of their input on the organization, thereby encouraging further investment from the youth.



YOUTH AUTONOMY

YOUTH AUTONOMY IS A SENSE OF SIGNIFICANCE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE IN THEIR ROLES, WHERE THEY HAVE THE ABILITY TO IMPACT THE ORGANIZATION.



EMPOWERING YOUTH

A key theme highlighted by young people who participated in our focus groups was the importance of giving autonomy to YACs.

Autonomy is crucial within youth advisory councils of mentoring organizations as it empowers young individuals to actively participate in decision-making processes that directly impact them. Providing autonomy ensures that the YACs reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of young people, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to developing and improving your mentoring programs and services.

GUIDELINES & EXPECTATIONS FOR A YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

To establish clear guidelines and expectations for a youth advisory council (YAC), an organization should begin by defining the council's specific purpose and goals.

Outline the objectives the council aims to achieve. (e.g., reviewing and revising program curriculum)



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Ensure that council members understand their role in the broader organizational context (e.g. create dashboard reports that highlight the impact of the council's projects.)



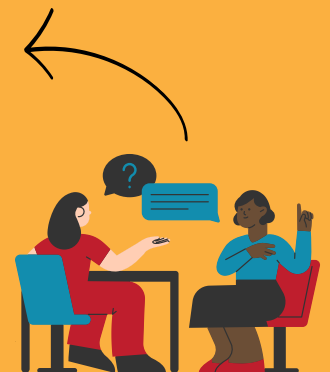
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Create detailed role descriptions, including time commitments and specific responsibilities for all members of the council (e.g. have council members contribute to a policies and procedures document that set expectations and procedures for the council.)



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If your organization serves and works with the youth, implement their voice, collect and be open to receiving feedback, and most importantly, IMPLEMENT feedback!



“Your goal will never be fully attained without the youth”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

WAYS A YAC CAN BE STRUCTURED



POSSIBLE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:



PRESIDENT

Leads council meetings, sets agendas, represents the council to the organization.



VICE PRESIDENT

Works collaboratively with the President and assumes their responsibilities in their absence.



SECRETARY

Takes meeting notes, maintains records and attendance, and ensures communication among members.



TREASURER

Manages the council's budget, leads fundraising efforts, coordinates purchases and ensures financial transparency.



ROTATING LEADERSHIP

Team members take turns leading different projects/meetings, this keeps all team members engaged and develops leadership characteristics in all team members.



SUB-COMMITTEES

Separate groups for things like event planning, community outreach, and a social media team allows members to specialize in topics and projects that interest them.



MENTORSHIP PAIRING

Members of the council can learn from experienced members or adults that have leadership roles in the organization or council.

**Example of a
Hierarchy System**

**Example of Non-
Hierarchy System**

RECRUITING COUNCIL MEMBERS

Organizations must convey how participation in the council offers tangible opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and community impact. Clear communication about the role's responsibilities, the influence participants' wield, and the supportive environment fostered by the organization are essential up-front in attracting motivated and committed youth.

WAYS TO PROMOTE RECRUITMENT

- **Posting on social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, etc.)**
- **Engaging with current and past youth program participants**
- **Word of mouth**
- **Newsletters**
- **Bulletin boards (e.g., online, at local cafes, schools, college campuses, etc.)**



TIMEFRAMES

Organizations should consider timeframes when the council is operational to maximize the investment into building one. Organizations should emphasize flexibility in hours, commitments, and a willingness to work with a youth's schedule as they promote council roles. They should also consider their program structure to identify which times of the year would likely yield the most diversified pool of youth applicants; consider a few examples from the program types and youth schedules below.

School-based programs—Program recruitment may increase as students return to school in the fall. During this period, there may be an increase in council member applicants from students looking to partake in extracurricular activities.

Community-based programs may offer after-school activities that carry over during out-of-school time. These programs may see an increase in applicants during the fall and early summer seasons.

College programs may see rises in applications two to three times a year at the start of a new semester or trimester.

Programs looking to recruit council members of high school age and younger may consider offering summer positions (when those young people are on break and may have more capacity and time to dedicate to a program). Programs looking to hire college students may be able to recruit youth council members throughout the year since college students have more autonomy in creating their schedules throughout the year.

These are just a few examples for programs to consider and are not exhaustive.



COMPENSATION IS NECESSARY

Compensation, both monetary and non-monetary, is crucial for recruiting and retaining young talent. Incentives can help attract diverse talent and foster a sense of belonging and commitment among council members, improving their overall experience.



Providing financial incentives like stipends or scholarships recognizes the value of youth contributions and helps overcome potential financial barriers to participation. This is especially crucial when assigned projects are time intensive and require a significant contributions.



Forms of compensation enable young individuals to feel like valued team members alongside adult employees, potentially increasing their motivation and commitment to the work and the impact they can make on the council.



Non-monetary compensation can include professional development opportunities, mentorship from senior staff, and recognition for achievements. In situations where monetary compensation is unavailable, gift cards, food, and letters of recommendation can be used instead of wages. These incentives are appropriate for smaller projects and should be tailored to meet the needs and interests of the individuals involved.



APPLICATION TEMPLATE



PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name,
Contact Information:
Age, Grade/Level:
School/Institution:
Preferred Pronouns:
General Availability:
Any Other Applicant Information that needs to be collected:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Brief Bio: Encourage applicants to share about themselves
Community Involvement: Activities, volunteer work, or leadership roles outside of school
Relevant Skills and Experiences: Any skills (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork)

MOTIVATION TO JOIN

Why Join?: Ask applicants to articulate their reasons for wanting to join the advisory council and what they hope to contribute.
Expectations: What they expect to gain from the experience.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Challenges and Solutions: Prompt applicants to discuss a challenge facing youth today and propose a solution.
Role of Youth Leadership: How they believe youth can contribute to decision-making and community change. Provide a specific example of a change they will advocate for as a council member.

Important: If you are looking to recruit council members **younger than 18 years old**, it is important to have a guardian sign off on their participation in the council. Additionally, it is essential to conduct a background check on the program supervisor.

ACTIVITIES FOR A YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

CAMARADERIE BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Allowing team members to connect (in person especially) can foster a friendlier and more successful work environment. Here are some good ways:

- **Team Dinners, City Tours and Sports Game Outings** are a great way for team members to connect outside of work.
- **Community Service** can be a great way to allow youth to give back and make a tangible impact, such as park clean-ups, food or clothing drives, or tutoring programs.

TEAM BUILDING & COLLABORATION PROJECTS

- **Youth Conferences** led, planned, and executed by youth can foster team-building and allow youth to practice their leadership skills.
- **Webinars, Interviews, and Podcasts** led, planned, and executed by youth can allow them to develop public speaking skills and offer them an opportunity to network with other professionals and young people.
- **Social Media Campaigns** which provide members of the council the opportunity to raise awareness about organizational initiatives on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube
- **Fundraisers and Sustainability Projects** are also great opportunities for youth to lead and support the organizational continuation of the council for future young people.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- **Providing Training** on effective communication, public speaking, presentation skills, and active listening.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Organizations should also invite their council members to networking events where their youth can connect with professionals, community leaders, and other youth councils to build valuable relationships.
- **College Campuses Visits:** Establishing connections with college communities can be crucial for exposing young people to various college options. College may provide young people with opportunities for personal, social, and professional growth.

IMPLEMENTING YOUTH FEEDBACK

It is extremely important to continually collect opinions about projects from council members to help ensure the projects are relevant and engaging.



ACTIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

Create a space where youth are able to voice their opinions on the structure and roles of the council for any adjustments that need to be made and communicate how this feedback will be integrated.

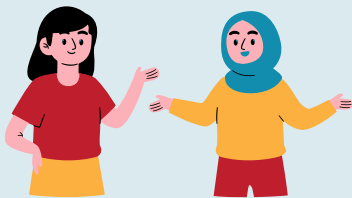


BE CREATIVE

Be creative about incorporating youth, integrate them into the decision making process, and let youth be in the room when decisions are made or events where they would benefit from attending.

“ YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS ARE AS VALUABLE AS THE ORGANIZATION ALLOWS THEM TO BE ”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT



1-1 MEETINGS

Frequently throughout the year, the council members should have one-on-one meetings with an adult supervisor to get feedback on projects and time commitments and gauge their engagement and interest.

Strive to make the experience for youth as valuable as possible, and remember to always tailor it to the needs and wants of the young people in the YACs.

TAILORED EXPERIENCES

Youth across our focus groups indicated that tailored experiences produce better professional and personal results for the youth in leadership roles.

EXPECTATIONS FROM YOUTH

Asking the members of the YAC what they want to get out of the experience and what skills they want to improve will help them along the way, and will also improve the work of your organization!



PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Put yourself in the shoes of the young people in your YAC and ask, **"What skills and assignments would I like to practice and do if I were a new YAC member?"**

CONSISTENT FEEDBACK FROM ADULTS

Offering ongoing feedback is an important part of supporting youth in their roles. Supervisors should tailor feedback to support youth's communication and learning styles. For example, does the youth prefer feedback in writing first so they have time to process before discussing in person?





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NOTES FROM THE NMRC YOUTH COUNCIL

“Being part of the NMRC Youth Advisory Council has been very beneficial for my personal and professional growth. The assignments given to me have been challenging but rewarding because they have allowed me to learn new skills like video editing, podcasting, and guide-writing. What I appreciate most about the council is its flexibility and openness to feedback, but most importantly its openness to feedback. This part is really challenging, but really amazing and that is why I highlight it so much. My team is not only receptive to suggestions but actively seeks them out to improve our overall experience and outcomes. This friendly and collaborative environment has fostered a sense of friendship and mutual respect among all of us, making it ideal for me for learning. I am grateful for the opportunities provided by the NMRC YAC!!”



“Internships have been very important in my personal and professional growth because they have provided invaluable hands-on experience and practical skills that classroom learning alone has never offered me. Through internships and the NMRC council, I’ve had the opportunity to apply knowledge to real-world scenarios and practice skills like teamwork and communication. And engaging directly with professionals has allowed me to build a network, learn from mentors, and understand workplace expectations and norms and proper behavior. I have had the blessing of being part of great internship programs in which learning and improvement are emphasized not only through pre-determined expectations and assignments, but also through some autonomy in letting me choose assignments I want to work on and recommend assignments and projects that add value to the workplace.”

