



Youth

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FACT SHEET

Involving Youth in Civic Life

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Involving youth in their communities is important for healthy social development, enriched family life, and neighborhood vitality. Youth can contribute to the civic life of their communities by working in political campaigns, participating in local government meetings, supporting causes, fundraising for charities, serving on boards, and advising decisionmakers on issues of concern to young people. Civic involvement often gives youth new friends and interests, a heightened sense of responsibility to peers and the community, improved leadership skills, increased self-esteem, and a strengthened sense of accomplishment. Communities benefit from the creative new ideas, energy, and enthusiasm of youth. Two activities that enhance civic involvement are Youth Advisory Councils and Youth Town Hall Meetings.

Youth Advisory Councils

Youth Advisory Councils (YAC's) comprise young people who regularly advise policymakers (for example, Members of Congress, mayors, city council members) on youth issues. YAC's offer youth civic roles, a voice in the legislative process, and opportunities to learn about the legislative process firsthand. YAC's give policymakers the opportunity to learn about youth by working with them. YAC members, policymakers, and their staffs discuss youth issues and pending legislation at regular meetings or through letters, conference calls, e-mail messages, online chats, or videoconferences. YAC members support youth initiatives, work on community service projects, help policymakers organize civic events, and offer advice on legislative and policy issues.

You can start a YAC by contacting a local policymaker and

forming a committee of youth from diverse backgrounds, a few adults who work well with youth, and some of the policymaker's staff; additional supporters who are ages 18 to 24 can serve as advisors. Determine the structure of the YAC; then create a mission statement, goals, and strategic plan. Form committees based on the goals of the YAC and convene committee meetings. Develop a community outreach plan for the policymaker and YAC members to promote the YAC in the community and to generate interest and stimulate the exchange of information and ideas. Federal, State, or local policymakers can benefit from YAC's.

Youth Town Hall Meetings

Youth Town Hall Meetings (YTHM's) are 1- to 2-hour discussions between panels of youth and adults and diverse audiences about "hot" topics such as gun violence, curfews,

and substance abuse. YTHM's provide youth and adults ways to communicate, work, and act together on issues they care about or that have affected them.

To plan a YTHM, bring together a committee of youth and adults who represent local businesses, nonprofit organizations, government, and media. Select a suitable meeting place such as a school gymnasium, local auditorium, or State House. Choose youth and adults (for example, local public officials, teachers, business and nonprofit representatives) who have experience on the topic selected for discussion. Invite community members (including public officials) who will present different perspectives. Create publicity fliers. Develop press releases for the media and information packets for the audience. Compile resource lists for followup action.

A youth or adult experienced in facilitating discussions serves as a YTHM moderator and can either ask the panelists questions to which they respond or let each panelist speak briefly on the chosen topic. The moderator then facilitates an audience question-and-answer period. Community mem-

bers can meet after the YTHM to agree on further action. For example, a coalition of youth and adults planned a YTHM with members of the Indiana State Legislature to discuss youth positions on school boards. On Capitol Hill, participants in a YTHM asked Members of Congress to consider opinions from youth when making decisions about juvenile violence issues. By encouraging collaboration with policymakers, YTHM's offer youth an active role in civic life while helping policymakers to make better informed decisions.

Resources

To learn more about how youth can get involved in their communities, visit OJJDP's Internet Kid's Page at www.usdoj.gov/Kidspage/getinvolved. The following are some helpful resources for organizing Youth Advisory Councils and Youth Town Hall Meetings.

Phillip Lovell
Center for Youth as Resources
1000 Connecticut Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20036
202-261-4181
www.yar.org (Internet)

Amy Weisenbach
National 4-H Council
7100 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999
301-961-2972
www.fourhcouncil.edu/cyd (Internet)

Muata Kiongozi
National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20036
202-466-6272
www.weprevent.org (Internet)

Patrice Bey
National Youth Network
1000 Connecticut Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20036
202-261-4141
www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/nyn/index/html
(Internet)

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