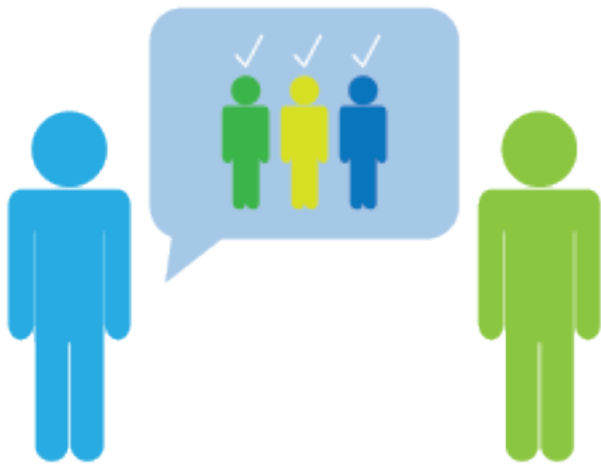


TIPS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS



Young People are an Asset

Treat youth as allies, not like a burden. The policies that you create are the same policies that control our lives. We want a voice in the way that our lives are decided, and our input is valuable to the political process. Instead of thinking about us as another party to please, think of us as an ally. We often see things very differently than you. Our perspectives can give valuable insight into the world, unique perspectives which you cannot understand without collaborating with us. Give us a space where we can give you feedback.

Listen to us! Don't patronize. We have a voice, a powerful one. It should not be dampened by the harping praises of non-youth nor should it be belittled because of the differences in opinion that we bring. As our elected official, your voice represents all of us -- regardless of our age. Your decisions should be made with a serious consideration of youth input.



Due Diligence

Ask Us! Don't make assumptions. It is the job of policy makers to reflect the thoughts and opinions of their constituents. It is important to not make assumptions about the thoughts and ideas of youth because your assumptions are often not representative of our perspectives. Young people are full of new, innovative, and effective ideas of how to make change, especially in our own environments.

Get youth voice and input. Take into consideration youth input and recommendations! Many of the policies and programs that policy makers implement directly affect young people, but often times, youth are never asked their opinions about what they believe will truly benefit their schools and communities.



Be Inclusive

Include youth in decision making groups, voting power, airtime during meetings.

Youth have great ideas! Ask youth what they want and need - don't just make assumptions. Also, make sure to check that you are addressing problems in an appropriate way - include students in every step of the process - planning, implementing, and evaluating policies.

Don't tokenize. Having meetings where youth are allowed to attend is not enough - youth need to have the ability to influence decisions. This means there can't just be one youth who is there as the "token young person." There needs to be multiple youths so you can get multiple perspectives, and these youth need to have the opportunity to speak and be taken seriously. Don't talk over or interrupt youth or tell them their ideas are "not worth your time." Additionally, youth need voting power. We are not there simply to make you look good. We need actual power and that includes the right to express when we think ideas are bad by voting them down.

Metropolitan Youth Policy Fellows: Who We Are

The Metropolitan Youth Policy Fellows are a diverse group of youth working together for a better Metropolitan Detroit region. With the support from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, we developed a social justice survey which included questions that seemed to reflect the issues that impacted us and our peers the most. In total, more than 1,100 youth from across the metropolitan Detroit region participated in sharing their thoughts, feedback, and ideas on issues facing the region. Throughout this process, our goal has been to work to increase youth voice in the region. We believe that young people know what the issues are in their schools and communities and that they have great ideas for solutions.

