

TIPS FOR YOUTH



Get Organized

Set goals. It is important to establish your purpose as a group because it will help you figure out what you want to accomplish. If you do not know what the purpose of your group is, then nobody else will. Developing an elevator pitch you can give to other people is a quick and easy way to determine and communicate why your group exists and the long term goals you wish to accomplish. It is also extremely helpful to establish both long and short term goals for your group. By setting goals, you give your group something to work towards.

Develop a meeting schedule. Consistency is important, especially when working with a new group. By establishing a set meeting schedule, students will be able to block out time in their week dedicated to your meetings. This will help identify a core group of student leaders who are committed and willing to work.

Create meeting agendas. Creating meeting agendas (current meeting and next meeting) is an easy way to ensure that meetings are on task, and productive. It is also very important that everyone in the group receives a copy of the agenda before the meeting begins. This will allow time for students to form thoughts or questions they have beforehand. Having an agenda ready will minimize wasted meeting time because everyone will already know what needs to be accomplished. It is also useful to

assign tasks to be completed in between meetings, so that students are also actively working outside of meetings.

Identify a core group of youth leaders.

Many times there will be tons of people who care and want to help, but not everyone is willing or able to commit the same amount of time. Consequently, it is imperative to have a core group of 4-5 youth who are willing to take the lead. Consistency is important so even if the other youth rotate in and out of the big group, this core group will always be there and the rest of the group can rely on them to know what's going on.



Get Support

Find adults to support your initiatives.

Adults are important for youth groups. Adults are a way to access resources, in addition to being great resources themselves. Look for adults who are willing to listen to you and your ideas. Make sure they don't take over - youth-driven projects or groups need to have youth leading them. Ask teachers, administrators, or any other adults that you trust to help you organize your group and complete your project.

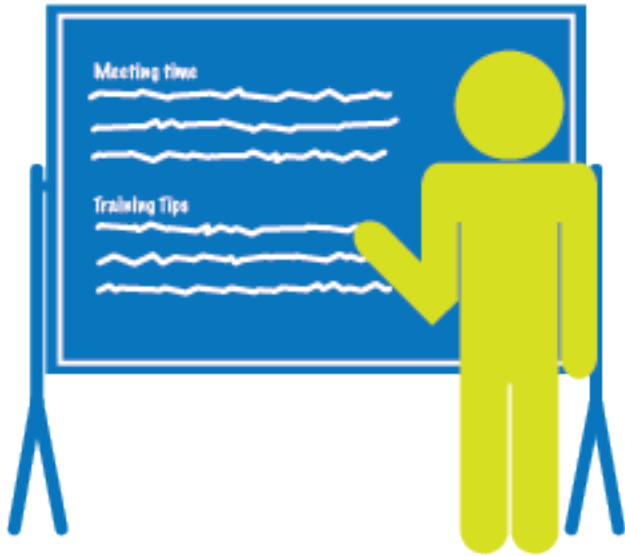
Set expectations - for involved youth, for adult allies.

It's important that while you're determining the logistics of your group, you all make sure that you know what's expected of you



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and what's expected of everyone else as well. Whether it's getting to meetings on time, making sure that your part of the project is completed by a certain date, or only being allowed to miss a meeting once a month, it's up to you. You should also set expectations for adults so that they can help you better by knowing exactly what they're expected to do, and so that they know their limits in your project.



Sustain Your Work

Find regular meeting space & time. In staying organized and on task, it's fundamentally important that you find a space that you know is accessible to you at a time that works. It's better if it's the same time, at a given interval to meet so that your group knows what's going on and where to go. For instance, you could meet every Tuesday at 4pm at your community center, or your favorite teacher's classroom (with approval, of course).

Develop rotating leadership, to keep up momentum/maintaining “institutional memory.” If you have a “leader” of your group such as a president or vice-president, make sure that you train and show the newer people of the group how to do the job. You want to create a system that can thrive even after the founders and leaders have left the group. You could do this by electing two presidents: one who is an older group member, and one who is a younger group member who will be

there long after the older one has left. The younger president is trained by the older president so they know exactly how to run the show.

Documentation. When you have many meetings, or very long meetings, it can be difficult to remember every comment or idea that's come up in the past. Make sure you get it all down on paper, and then make sure that you have a safe place, or an organized group member, that's willing to keep the files of the group. Being swamped in paperwork is no fun, but what's worse is trying to recall the brilliant lightbulb that went off over someone's head two weeks ago.



TIPS FOR ADULT ALLIES



Authenticity - Know WHY You're Engaging

Be genuine. It's pretty obvious to youth when adults don't care. So, make a conscious effort to make yourself available and to be engaged. Authenticity is important because if the youth think they aren't a priority for you, then they will feel unimportant and as a result they will stop trying. Don't say things like "let's get this over with" or "let's finish as soon as possible, I have other things to do." Instead, let the youth know that you are invested in helping them and they are a priority to you.

Reflect on your power and privilege. As an adult, you have power. Make sure you are aware of your power and aware of how it affects your interactions with youth. Additionally, you are privileged in the sense that community leaders will listen to your ideas more readily than they might listen to youths' ideas. Use this to your group's advantage - use your privilege to bring attention to the group of youths and then allow the youth to take over once they have people's attention. Use your individual power to help increase the power of the group.



Reaching Out to Youth

Don't rely on youth to seek you out. Students are often not exposed to social justice issues and organizations until high school. Reaching out to students is a great way to get more youth involved, to target young people who may not feel comfortable asking for help, and to show support for the group/organization.

Provide space, be easy to access, and invite conversation. Communication is extremely important when working with youth. Students can sometimes feel intimidated talking to teachers, so it is helpful when the teacher initiates the conversation. Communicating with students is



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much more effective when the students feel that the teacher is on the same level as they are, rather than in an authoritative position.



Be a “coffee filter.” A better way to think about your role in a youth group dynamic is as a filter. The same substance that goes through the filter comes out, but more refined in terms of working towards the purpose. Don’t change the direction of the idea or flow of thoughts, but help in the refinement of the process towards the goal.

Don’t tokenize. Youth don’t often get the chance to speak and voice our opinions about the systems that decide our life path, and often when we do our voice is taken as a token; something to be praised and admired, but not taken seriously. This is not a productive way to view us. We all have powerful voices, and the best way to respond to and work with youth is the same way in which you would to a fellow adult, with trust and respect.

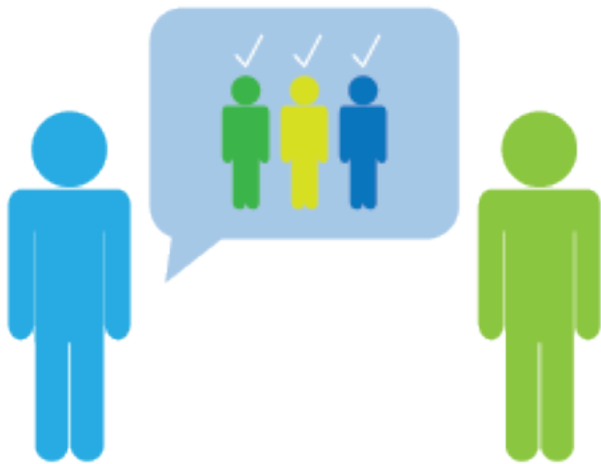
Constructive Feedback - Know HOW You’re Engaging

Don’t shut down ideas. Shutting down ideas is silencing the voice of youth who seek to be heard. Be a resource to bounce ideas off of and give constructive feedback rather than saying, “no, that’s not possible.” Don’t be afraid to voice your opinions, but be a voice of reason rather than the terminator of ideas. Be reasonable with what you say, and help them be reasonable with their goals over a set time period.

Be a resource rather than take the lead. Youth driven projects are supposed to be just that - driven by youth. Don’t take the lead, but give your input as a member of the group, rather than as a group leader or decision maker. Give the youth resources; whether it’s your adult mindset, or being a supervisor for their meetings, be there for them rather than be the leader of them.



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.



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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.

