

Partnering with Youth and Young Adults on Committees and Boards: A Protocol for Supporting their Active Participation and Contributions

Patrice Fetzner, Terre Garner, Rick Shepler, Nicole Deschenes, Tova Black, and Ebony Hollamon

Involving youth and young adults (aka young people) on committees is important to thoughtful planning on issues and decisions that involve them. Also, important is the thoughtful planning and preparation that should take place to maximize the young person's contribution and the committee's benefit from the young person's involvement. The following protocols are meant to serve as a starting point for supporting transition age youth and young adult's participation and contribution on committees at local, state, and national levels. We encourage each community to add to this list to accommodate for the unique culture and dynamics of their respective communities.

- **Respectful, Validating, and Valuing Approach**
 - Youth and young adults are experts in their life experiences and should be treated as experts
 - Provide tangible acknowledgement of the young person's value (validate their contribution with a stipend, gift card, etc.)
 - Provide verbal encouragement, support, and appreciation (praise) for their willingness to contribute and participate

- **Training and Experiences**
 - Link youth and young adults to leadership training opportunities (assist with information, connections to other youth and young adult attendees, financial supports to attend, if needed)
 - Assist youth and young adults in organizing annual conferences/gatherings -- for youth and young adults -- to learn about leadership and advocacy skills
 - Promote and arrange for shared (cross-system) leadership training opportunities for TAY

- **Transportation Supports**
 - Transition age youth and young adults require planned and possibly subsidized transportation supports
 - Arrange for transportation and payment in advance
 - Plan for meeting arrival 30 minutes prior to meeting
 - Meet young person at the main door to the facility and escort to your meeting room

- **Translation Support**
 - Avoid use of lingo or acronyms
 - Be ready and willing to explain concepts under discussion
 - Provide an annotated list of key “system terms” and provide a brief definition and context for each
 - Have mentor sit next to youth to answer questions or provide clarification about the meeting or language used

- **Meeting Preparation Supports for Youth and Young Adults:**
 - Explain the mission and purpose of the group to the young person
 - Explain what you know about the culture and values of the group
 - Be sure youth and young adults have the meeting agenda and an opportunity to review it with a committee member or mentor in advance
 - Supply list of names of people attending the meeting and their roles and positions
 - Help young person prepare their own talking points
 - Role play the meeting with the youth prior to the meeting
 - Coach young person on appropriate dress
 - Coach young person on what to expect and how to handle themselves
 - Have paper and supplies available for the young people for note taking, or writing down questions or comments they want to make
 - Make sure young people feel a part of the meeting by including them in group emails and meeting reminders

- **Structure Meetings for Youth Member Participation and Involvement**
 - Plan for shorter meetings
 - Take strategic breaks to ask young person if they have any questions, to provide explanations, and to reinforce their involvement
 - Have more than one youth/young adult present (being the only one can be intimidating)
 - Have a youth/young adult break-out meeting to facilitate youth voice and then reconvene with spokesperson to represent their views
 - Be specific about what input you are expecting
 - Plan for more interactive and engaging meeting discussion and activities
 - Supply food

- If the group’s tradition is to buy lunch, have the cost of the young persons’ food covered in a seamless fashion
 - Consider holding meeting in youth and young adult friendly environment – meeting on their turf – where they are comfortable
 - Work with young people to define **their** role in the group and the group’s work
 - Coach the group on understanding TAY culture and the benefit of why you are including TAY on this committee
- **During the Meeting**
 - Have “meeting mentor” attend meeting and sit next to the young person
 - Encourage young person to write questions as they come to mind during the meeting
 - Mentor can respond with a quick written response or clarification, and/or encourage the young person to voice their feedback or question during an appropriate time in the meeting
 - Mentor can model writing questions and comments to young person first, if needed
- **Follow-up with Youth**
 - Follow-up and debrief with young person immediately after the meeting and later in the week to process their experience and answer any questions
 - Re-invite young person to next meeting
 - Have meeting leader connect with the young person pre and post meeting
 - Prepare young person for any follow-up community meeting by discussing the meeting minutes from the previous meeting
- **Working with Organizations**
 - **Sell the benefit:** Contact organizations and advocate on the merits of having young people involved in their organization or group
 - **Getting comfortable:** Invite young person to meetings as “guest” where there is no pressure or expectation to contribute. This serves two purposes: 1) the young person gets comfortable with the process; and 2) the workgroup becomes more comfortable with a young person being present at their group.