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Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Youth Summits and Forums Strengthen Youth Voice
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Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities (NLC)

Speakers:

David Donofrio, member, Youth Commission, Columbus, Ohio
Patty McMahon, Director, Mayor's Youth Council, City of Boston, Massachusetts
Heidi Yoakum, Coordinator, Youth Commission, City of Columbus, Ohio
Maggie Zach, member, Mayor's Youth Council, Boston, Massachusetts

KYLE: Good afternoon. My name is John Kyle. I'm with the Institute for Youth, Education and Families at the National League of Cities. Welcome to -- so many audioconferences that I've lost track of how many we've done, but it's about 26 or 27. We appreciate all of you phoning in to listen with us. We've been trying to listen to you as you've given us advice about our audioconferences, so you'll know that today's audioconference is at a different hour than usual, just to try to spread that around. It's difficult to find a time when a national audioconference can be held, but we thought we would try to do one later in the day this time. We also will try to use a Q&A format during part of the call later so that you can actually ask live questions of our panel.

Today we are talking about youth summits, youth forums, various kinds of gatherings in which youth get to speak out or make their voices known about issues of importance to them in their communities. We will have two different cities represented, each by an adult and each by a youth who have been active in these kinds of projects and activities in their communities. First in Boston, Massachusetts, we have the Director of the Mayor's Youth Council, Patty McMahon.

MCMAHON: Hello, this is Patty.

KYLE: Welcome, Patty, we're glad to have you here. And joining her is a member of the Mayor's Youth Council in Boston, Maggie Zach.

ZACH: Hi.

KYLE: And in Columbus, Ohio with the Youth Commission, we have Youth Commission, David Donofrio.

DONOFRIO: Hello, everyone.

KYLE: And the coordinator for the Youth Commission in Columbus, Heidi Yoakum.

YOAKUM: Good afternoon.

KYLE: You'll hear more from them and hopefully begin to recognize their voices as we go forward. David, I want to start with you. You have been a participant or helped to hold the most recent youth summit that I'm aware of -- October 15, I think. Columbus held a summit. Can you just give us a couple quick sentences about what went on on the 15th? How many? Was it good, bad or indifferent? We'll come back and get into a lot of details later perhaps, but just give us a couple of headlines.

DONOFRIO: Sure. We had 213 youths and young adults for the Summit 2004, sponsored by the Mayor's Columbus Youth Commission. And it was on a day off of school -- Central Ohio Teacher's Association Day -- and our theme was "Why?" referring to negative behaviors youths choose, and "Our City, Our Time" because it really is our city's future.

KYLE: Great. Maggie, your summit is generally in the spring, if I recall. But you also do some kind of forum in the fall. Could you tell me about one of the experiences you are either already planning for this fall, or what you're looking forward to in the spring or last spring?

ZACH: Sure. Every November we meet with city officials and we prepare presentations. And this is called our Youth Forum. The ideas that we present are things that we've been working on over the summer and they correspond to youth issues that we've developed from youth surveys and outreach in our neighborhoods.

KYLE: Great. We'll come back and ask some more about that. Heidi, tell us a little bit about your youth summit. I believe this was the fourth summit in Columbus, if I recall, or you told me earlier. How do summits get started? What's the context and how do they begin?

YOAKUM: Absolutely -- in terms of from a historical perspective, how do they come about? For us obviously this is a very efficient way of collecting a lot of input from youth at one time. It takes a lot of work. Certainly there is a lot of lead time to developing a sizable youth summit. However, this is one of the most efficient ways to get this information.

KYLE: Did the idea for a summit come from adults? Come from youth? Come from the Mayor's office?

YOAKUM: The impetus for doing youth summits -- and actually this is part of our enabling legislation that established the Columbus Youth Commission in our city code. We are a permanent part of our city code. And that is one of the responsibilities of the Youth Commission is to hold an annual summit. And in fact, they specified October as well. So we're right in line with that. The folks who came together to develop the

legislation were a collection of youth serving organizations, young people as well as some government officials. Because we work very closely with City Council, that whole piece that preceded me and the youth commissioners being in place was chaired by actually our youngest City Council members.

KYLE: Give us some background, please, on Boston, Patty. You've been doing summits, I believe, for ten or more years at this point. How did this get part of what you were doing?

MCMAHON: Well, prior to the Mayor's Youth Council, we had a Youth Leadership Program in Boston. And when Mayor Menino came in office in '94, he said he wanted to make sure that they had a really active role in government -- participatory. So we looked at what we had been doing and tried to figure out how we could take and go from some of the things we had -- a Youth Congress, we used to call it. And it was mainly kids getting up and speaking at microphones saying what they didn't like about things.

So what we transitioned into when we did the Youth Council was having them go out and ask kids what the issues were and asking young people what it was -- both issues and positive solutions. So we started putting together the Youth Forum as a way to take and make sure that young people then saw their ideas and solutions being brought to the city officials. So the young people who participate in the survey or in focus groups in the summer are invited to the presentations of the Youth Forum, which as gotten very competitive between the different subcommittees to the point where they have PowerPoint presentations. We then follow up with the different agencies on the issues and the potential solutions that have been brought up at the Youth Forum. And then a lot of those same topics are those things that we look at when we're planning our Youth Summit in the spring so that we're following up and making sure that all these ideas are kind of continuous.

KYLE: Maggie and David, why don't you take first and then go second in this question? How do you feel about the adequacy or the ability of youth to really be involved in the issues that the forums in Boston, for instance, take on -- you know, these PowerPoint presentations that Patty was just referring to? Or in Columbus, the theme of the summit -- what participation did the youth who serve on the Youth Commission have in formulating that? Just how do each of you feel that your views got represented to you and your colleagues or other youth represented in those events?

DONOFRIO: Maggie?

ZACH: Sure. I believe that as a member of the Mayor's Youth Council, I'm able to voice my opinions on all sorts of issues. And after developing our focuses, we're really able to investigate the problems. And then from the problems, we can really think about solutions. So I think that by having the Mayor there and the city officials, we can really make changes in the city. So I think that in this way we can participate and have our voices heard.

DONOFRIO: I agree with Maggie completely. And I've also gotten a completely new perspective on this, becoming the Vice-Chair of the Columbus Youth Commission this year. It's also, as Miss Heidi said, the third year I've been on the Youth Commission.

And the Youth Summit is a sense of empowerment. That's the reason why our theme was "Our City, Our Time," because youth really can have a unique opportunity to come forward and voice our opinion in different workshops, come together, enjoy things that they all enjoy. And then come together and allow us as youth commissioners to compile their perspectives into a list where we can come up with, from those ideas, some ideas for solutions for those for the Mayor and City Council. It's a great opportunity for empowerment. I'm very proud to be a part of it.

KYLE: Maggie and David again -- give me an idea, Maggie, of either a topic that you think is going to be one of the hotly contested issues at the November forum, one of the ideas that will be discussed, whether or not it's the most important or the one that has the most attention. Just as an example of the kind of issue that gets discussed, that you think is going to be discussed this November. Or if it's too soon to really know that for sure, something that's been one of the hotly contested issues in the past. And David, similarly you're talking about issues -- it's "Our Time" -- what kind of specific issue did you see come out of this year's particular summit and what do you think the next step is going to be on it? Maggie, can you start with that?

ZACH: Sure, yeah. I think this fall we've been really involved in two major subjects. The first subject is neighborhood safety. Recently in Boston there has been a slight increase in violence, and especially homicide. So teenagers have been worried, and when they go out at night, they feel unsafe. And this has limited their access to programs. So we compiled a list of tips for a safe night out. But we want to go further and see if we can help better light the city or add more police activity and have a better interaction between police and youth. So these things we're going to ask the Mayor and also the Police Commissioner to see if we can get some progress on that.

The second thing is we want a better representation of youth in the media. We feel that there is a really negative portrayal of youth in the media. So we want to see if we can contact some of the major news programs in Boston, see if they'll put on a positive story like once a week or once a month to put teenagers in a better light.

KYLE: Okay, David?

DONOFRIO: Sure. I would completely agree with what's been said, especially with regard to violence. Our summit last October, the entire theme was anti-violence. And it was a very powerful, again, experience for us to come together and discuss, as well as in our current meeting. As you know, Columbus unfortunately has been leading the nation in some instances with violence. And it's a chance for us to come together with the youth and listen to their perspectives.

Our entire theme this year was "Why?" And it's referring to, like I said, the negative behaviors that some youths choose and are trapped in. And the first thing that we tried to identify in the summit is why are these things happening? Why, for example, are youths bullied? Why is homelessness a problem? Why are there problems with drugs or AIDS/HIV in people so young? And so we take these problems because it's a real chance to identify them. And then it is asked in the second part of our breakout sessions especially what can we do to make this better? And it's discussed with some solutions that way. If we can compile our solutions that way, we will be able to have something we can present possibly in a more specific form for the city to take action on

that.

KYLE: I think our audience should now feel pretty compelled to want to know more about how they can get the voices of youth involved in their communities. Patty and Heidi, I want to come back to you to talk a little bit further about the context in which these kinds of events occurred. You talked about the enabling legislation, Heidi, for instance in Columbus that requires you to hold a summit. But what else makes this happen? What is the city government's role? What does it take? Have you started planning October, 2005 yet?

YOAKUM: (laughs) Yes.

KYLE: So what kind of planning goes into it? And David might support you with some information about that, but I'd like to start with you, Heidi, and then go to Patty and then see what else we can learn about how you plan these kinds of things and where they come from.

YOAKUM: Sure. It really does make sense. Whether this would be in our enabling legislation or not, I'm sure we would have selected this sort of opportunity for gathering youth together and letting them positively feed off one another in terms of energy and empowerment, like David said. And really come up with the best solutions that they can in terms of how can we take control of ourselves and our city.

I think that we have learned a very powerful lesson this year when we were able to -- you won't believe this, I'm sure -- when we were able to finalize a location with about two and a half or three weeks before the summit. And that's entirely too late to be able to do the best possible job of getting the word out, although we did a yeoman's job of that. We do that because -- or we have experienced that because we have waited for the new youth commissioners, who are selected at the end of every August to be on board before we start planning the summit, wanting their full input. And we just made the decision -- we can't do that. We would love for the new youth commissioners to be able to have a say in everything -- location, date, whatever -- but it really is impractical. So yes, we have started planning for 2005, and at least those bare bones we've got to have in place. So the fact that we've been able to pull off the summits we have and reach the number of people that we have with that sort of timeframe each year in the past three years has been pretty remarkable. The young people on the Youth Commission are just spectacular.

KYLE: Patty, give us a little framework for you guys.

MCMAHON: Well, now it's like we have to do things different every year a little bit because doing it for ten years, we just try to keep it as fresh as we can so people don't say, "Oh, it's the same old event." We do hold our forum at Northeastern University because they're one of our partners and they're fantastic and supply the pizza and the soda for the event so that we can get young people who are coming after school who might be hungry so that we'll keep their attention for a couple of hours. And they have a great room that is an amphitheater that has a screen, so when we want to show videos or PSAs [public service announcements] that the young people have put together, we've been able to put those up. When we've had things from our website that we've wanted to

put up, we've been able to put that on the screen. So we've kind of booked that as far ahead as we can. I think we booked in July for the Youth Summit that we're going to end up doing in the beginning of December.

The Youth Summit, when we do that -- and that's time for us in the early spring/late winter -- so that we can kind of like help people connect with resources and opportunities. We've resourced there with like 75 agencies and we have 1,500 young people in teams. So it's really important to find a large space. Last year we did that at a nightclub, which had five different nightclubs hooked into each other. So that was a whole different logistic issue. We've also done the Youth Summit at Northeastern's hockey arena, and we've done it at a couple of different high schools in their gymnasiums and auditoriums. So we've done that a couple of different locations, and some have had pros and cons on it.

One of the things that I did want to add in there was in addition to the summit and Youth Forum and following with the different agencies who are out there and the professionals that come in and give us some ideas of who needs to be involved and how we can have the Youth Council encourage the partners that need to have the projects happen, we've found the website to be a really great way to follow up with people. So that if somebody brings up an issue, we can make sure that if we do job trips for teens, we're going to do it as a handout for people, but we're also going to put it on our website. College planning was a big issue for a couple years in particular. So we put college planning tips and scholarships for young people living in Boston on that. We did a consumer tips for teens -- it's called "Money Talks." And that was a handout, but also they put it as a .pdf onto the website. So we found that we had some really great ideas the first few years and we did get that information as follow up to some people, but we never reached as many people until we actually started putting it on the website so people could know if they went into this one page and they could link into some of the other things. And hopefully send us ideas, because we put on the website issues and positive solutions onto the website so people e-mail into the Youth Council themselves and let them know what issues that we may not have covered yet.

KYLE: What's an expected attendance at the summit in Boston these days?

MCMAHON: The Youth Summit is 1,500 young people and youth workers and the people who are coming in with workshops and youth entertainers. So it's kind of like a daylong event. The Youth Forum we hold to about 100 people only because we really try to take and have it be a chance where people are in a small enough room that they can actually be close to the speakers and the officials that are there. We did a thing on voting last year, and we had the Secretary of State come in because we had some issues on Massachusetts rules that we were lobbying to get changed. We got some of them changed -- not all of them.

KYLE: David and Maggie, you talked about the summit in Columbus being on a weekday, which happened to be a school holiday. Fill us in on whether that -- all four of them have been on weekdays, and I think in Boston it's traditionally held on a Saturday in the spring. What do you think about those kinds of dates? Do your friends and other youth think that those are good days? Would you prefer a different day, a different time of year? What do you think about that, Maggie and David?

DONOFRIO: I'll start. Certainly it's been at a different time and place during the different years. We had it on a day off of school this year hoping to attract people, especially from our older age group into the college age. However, as you know, our turnout was a bit limited due to trying to find a space and getting the word out in a matter of only two weeks.

However, our previous one was on a day of school. We actually had over double the turnout for that. And it really varies about how we will proceed with that. But we're trying to reach different audiences. And due to the fact that it was on a day off of school, we did have more diversity as far as school districts represented as well as the private/public factor. But like I said, the turnout was better for the day of school, and that may be because teachers could influence their classes to come for an educational and fun day.

KYLE: Maggie, what do you think about Saturday and the spring?

ZACH: Generally, I like it. The age group that we're trying to reach out to is 12 to 18. So these people are in high school, middle school. A lot of them are involved with afterschool activities. So it would be difficult to do an event like this after school for us, especially because it's not an educational -- it is an educational activity, but we try hard to make it fun as well, with food and talent. So it's not really something that schools will participate in. So Saturday mornings work out really well for us because it's a day off from school.

One problem that we had last year is that the Saturday that it was held on was an SAT day. So 17 year olds -- a bunch of juniors couldn't come. But otherwise, it works out really well.

YOAKUM: John, I wonder if I could add something.

KYLE: Sure.

YOAKUM: I just want to -- for the listeners, I'd just like to offer that while it is an incentive for young people to get off school if a summit or such is held on a school day, it can be a real hassle factor with the school administrations, who are saying, "No, not one more day out of school for our young people." They're already off for this, that and the other. And we have to keep attendance numbers, where they need to be and that kind of thing. So we did that just last year due to some particular circumstances. We're really puzzling about whether we want to -- we looked at Saturday as well. We talked about that this year for next year. And so it just depends on transportation -- is that more readily available? Is that possible through schools if it is on a school day? Or is the hassle factor for everybody too great?

MCMAHON: Yeah, I think those play into it also because different seasons, you're going to end up losing different sports on different days of the week. And you know, it's hard to come up with an ideal time. And then when you can't get free space, sometimes you've got to take it, and it's a disadvantage. So you've got to take and balance stuff off. It doesn't always work out perfect, but you try.

KYLE: Tell me a little bit about how you support, fund, fund raise for these

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events. I know more about the Boston summits because Patty and I have talked about them before. But I know that it's not just something that totally comes out of a city budget. Where are you getting funds to support it? What do you need funds for? What could you do without that's been a plus, but if you were telling somebody what kind of money they needed to organize a summit, what are the essentials and where do you think they're getting the money for that? Patty first, and then Heidi.

MCMAHON: Well, I think it's pretty cheap for the sake of -- I kind of go and do a lot of things during the course of the year for other people, and then they give me things. And the Youth Council members will volunteer and help people, so they kind of come back and help us. We've had to not worry about as much as the budget woes that other departments might have in the last couple of years because the Youth Council -- their work is for free. And we have volunteers from the Boston Bar Association who are free. So we've got some advantages there. And when it comes to the Youth Summit, the only cost to the city really comes from postage they don't necessarily see me using up to send some things out or the staff who might be working on a Saturday who normally wouldn't work on a Saturday. But an awful lot of those people do just come as volunteers and they're not getting paid for it.

The cost of t-shirts is kind of important for us because the kids have gotten used to that as something. So the young people who wouldn't normally go to an event where you're going to find about resources and opportunities and workshops and skits and panel discussions -- the t-shirt and some free food might help. We did cut back a little from our corporate sponsors just because of the cost of inflation. So we've only done one meal. So we've either done breakfast or lunch the last couple years, whereas the first few years we had done breakfast and lunch.

YOAKUM: We have similar thoughts and concerns and needs. I think that most such events for any group of people have similar things. And t-shirts, I agree, is a piece that we wouldn't want to cut. We don't have a terrific amount of money in our city budget in general at the moment. We are facing some budget crunch last year and this year, and so there is not a terrific amount that's earmarked for the Youth Commission, which is relatively new. So we have done some fundraising of our own in terms of having -- for instance, last spring we had a step show. Stepping may be familiar to some of the audience -- and that was a great fundraiser for us. It was a first-time effort, and it was also a great way to showcase some of the positive youth talent out there. It was called the "No More Drama Youth Step Show."

In any case, I think t-shirts and food -- we don't have -- with the economy of our city right now, we don't have too many folks who are willing to step up and offer too much in the way of food donated -- and postage certainly. We haven't had to pay for space yet, thank God, because that can cost a lot. We are looking at a site, however, that could cost a couple thousand dollars or more for next year. So that could be an essential issue.

MCMAHON: Yes, sometimes place might not charge you, but then you've got a charge for the custodians or security -- different factors that come with agreements. So those are the things that are hard to barter of.

YOAKUM: And I do want to make another note -- Patty, I'm so glad you mentioned
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how important it is that we get the opportunity to volunteer for other folks, other organizations and other efforts because then they will come and volunteer for us. And we take full advantage of that -- workshop providers, etc., do that kind of thing for us because we have assisted them as well. You know, in the non-profit world I think in general, but certainly in youth services, people want to do that as well. So it's been a wonderful piece.

KYLE: Maggie and David, walk through a summit day. First of all to start with, how long was the day? When did it start? When did it end? Just walk through a couple activity highlights. What segments do the day were there, or do you think there will be in April, Maggie?

ZACH: Okay, I'll start. The Youth Summit is from 9 to 1 on a Saturday. It's kind of like two arenas at once because onstage there is talent, which includes singing, stepping. There are skits. There are comedy acts. There are all sorts of things onstage. And then we integrate positive message skits. Like one time we did -- it was a skit with police officers and youths, and they switched roles. And the message was to help cooperation between police and youth. We also do have awards for youth who have been good citizens, who have done positive things. But simultaneously with that --

MCMAHON: -- Tell them what the prize is!

ZACH: The prize -- oh, it's a street sign with their name on it. It's pretty cool.
(laughter)

MCMAHON: And it doesn't cost anything.

KYLE: Public Works Department. (laughter)

ZACH: Anyway, simultaneously with that, we have program tables. We give out resources like brochures and applications for summer programs and afterschool programs and jobs and all sort of things like that. So people can listen to the singing onstage or talk to people about opportunities that they can later.

MCMAHON: And a lot of the issues that are focused on at the Youth Summit are things that we've done as issues and presentations in the Youth Forum in November. So they kind of play off each other.

DONOFRIO: I would agree. Actually our summit in Columbus is much the same way. Our summit was Friday, October 15 from 9 to 3, again, on a day off of school. We began with some inspirational speaking from one of our youth commissioners, Liliana Parra. She is a wonderful speaker, and she was speaking regarding why it's important for our voice to be heard, especially because her father came from a country where his voice could not be heard and why it's so important for us. We also had Pastor Tyus Nedd, I believe, of International Christian Center giving a motivational speech as well. We then broke up into a series of two workshops, which were of various topics regarding anything from hopelessness to sexual responsibility, the media and youth -- all sorts of things like that -- where all of these things like role playing, people talking about their problems and

solutions all come into play in a very unique way. Following that, we had lunch and some entertainment by youth. I was privileged to be a member of that entertainment. It's a great opportunity for youth to be able to express themselves that way in front of many people. We also then had a lively debate between Democratic and Republican candidates as well as the School Board for various issues as well as the Presidential Election, which was followed up by a mock election. And following that, there was more entertainment. And it was just a very fun, positive day, very light, but everybody enjoyed themselves very much. And then of course, there were free t-shirts at the end.

YOAKUM: And that's kind of key. You have to give them out at the end. We used to give them in the beginning, and people seem to disappear during the day once they had their t-shirt.

MCMAHON: (laughs) Absolutely.

KYLE: I didn't get my t-shirt yet.

MCMAHON: Uh-oh. It must have arrived yet, John.

KYLE: Well, it's just a hint. It didn't arrive yet. (laughter)

MCMAHON: This year, because we had ours at a nightclub, the Youth Council designed a t-shirt that had spotlights coming off of it. So it's a very nice color. You'll like it.

KYLE: Great, I look forward to it. Patty and Heidi, you've given us a great snapshot of what the day usually looks like. Is this how it's always looked? Have all four summits looked pretty much like that? Have you evolved? Have the ten summits looked like that, Patty? Has there been an evolution? Or are you still experimenting? Do you change it purposely, that you try and do some different kinds of things? Does the fact that youth change perhaps more often than the adults do, who are responsible for carrying this out because they age out of the system, although that may not have happened much in Columbus yet? But I know that happened in Boston over the ten years, that people have come and gone, but Patty is still there. Have these evolved? And what's your best advice about the principle that you are hoping to have occur in the planning of what the day looks like? It may not be that we always want to have this particular activity, but we always want to make sure we're following this kind of principle of -- you know, small group/big group. One of the things you just said was you always hand out the prize at the end. That's a principle. Okay, are there some other principles about the planning that you can share with us.

YOAKUM: Patty?

MCMAHON: Well, I think that in the beginning we had planned on maybe 500 and end up with 800 the first year. And the first few years we actually broke into workshops. And when you got up to 1,200, I lost friends who could no longer volunteer and run, having a youth and a teen in each workshop. Because at one point we had 45 running simultaneously, and I got concerned about quality control. Not everybody was able to come for the training that we did ahead of time. So we kind of had to separate that piece

out and look how we could have the same concepts on the stage. And that came from different years we'll do like a panel discussion. We'll do a talk show -- a variety of different things to try to get people -- games that we've done. One year we had "Step Up and Make it Happen" around the craze of the question-and-answer shows. We had prizes. We did a different thing this year where there was a door prize and there were different things that you could win -- tickets to the Red Sox -- World Championship Team -- (laughter)

YOAKUM: Congratulations!

MCMAHON: And then they had things to do with the Boston Celtics -- who haven't been doing as well -- but we had different people donating different things. So we do try to bring in something different every single year. And that's sort of also how we'll look at -- with registration, we have people pre-registered. Most of them go online. So it's an exercise we've learned as we've gone along, that they register online. It saves us from reading their writing -- (laughter) -- and also gets people used to using a computer for something besides a chat room kind of situation. So they actually see how to fill out an application. So that's a (inaudible) skill as they go along. Something the youth work and can sit down with the teams and say, "Okay, I'm not going to fill this form out for you. I want you to take turns and fill it out." So we try to encourage that part because the summer jobs program, most of those applications now come in online. So they've kind of helped each other out a little bit. So those are the things -- we've added pieces in as it's gone along. But when we got up to 1,500, we had to think about how to get to the audience.

And we also videotape it, so you can watch it online at our website, and we'll give that later on. And you also can take and show that on the cable station over and over again. And people don't always admit how many times they've seen it. But this way we can actually find people who for whatever reason couldn't go to a youth summit, or maybe have a certain image of teams actually get to see positive teens doing things, having discussions and get that out to an even wider audience.

YOAKUM: You've raised some excellent points, Patty, and I so appreciate hearing your thoughts and feeling them resonate for me and for us. I just also want to add a quick aside that Patty was one of the folks who was most helpful to me when I first started with the Columbus Youth Commission. She just gave me open arms in terms of whatever she could provide information on. I just want to thank you publicly for that.

MCMAHON: You're very welcome!

YOAKUM: Absolutely. I agree with the registering online being an awesome way to be able to read people's names, etc. Yes, and you're right, a great way to use the computer. My colleague on the call, David Donofrio, has been the person who has established our non-city sponsored website that is linked to our city site. And it's far superior, of course, to the city site. (laughter)

DONOFRIO: Thank you.

YOAKUM: It is. And so he has placed the registration forms online. And that has

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been a great help to us. We also tape the program on our youth summits and many activities that we do, including our police and youth forum panel discussion last night actually. And you're right, people won't admit how many times they watch government-sponsored TV. But it really is a wonderful way, especially with rebroadcasts over and over for the folks to see it and to see what young people are up to.

One of the other things I would say -- and I can certainly understand why if you're at 1,500 people, workshops may not be so feasible. Quality control -- I understand the issue. We are at the point still where we really think that's a great value, to have small groups for young people to be able to meet. That's one of the key reasons they like to come to an event like this. And to be able to discuss in a smaller setting some of the thoughts and concerns that they have. And so I would encourage those of you who are out there listening who have the opportunity to work with a manageable number of participants to do small groups if you don't already. Workshop settings, discussion groups, whatever they might be -- that really is a great thing I think for young people.

KYLE: Let me ask Maggie and David to respond to a question, and let the audience know that in a couple of minutes, we'll provide some opportunity for you to ask some questions of this group. And we'll continue talking in case there aren't any live questions. But we'll try and make some room for live questions. So think about that in the audience. "*1" is what you should press on your phone, and Crystal will queue you up. You'll be lined up in the order of you pressing the phone. And if you press "#", you will get out of queue if you hear your question already answered or need to move onto something else before we get to you.

But David and Maggie -- consider the possibility that you are a youth, a young person in a city where there is no youth summit. You don't happen to be in those cities, but there are lots of cities around the country where there are not such kinds of activities going on. What can you give as an advice to the young people in that community about how to get one started? Who do you think they should talk to? There may not be a Heidi or a Patty specifically. But what kinds of people would you encourage to be their adult allies? How would you organize? Can you give some hints about how you would push to have such an event occur, because both of you are being very articulate about reasons why what should occur? How would you do that if you were in a city where it didn't happen?

ZACH: I'll start. In Boston there are liaisons to each neighborhood. And instead of talking to the Mayor himself, because he has such a huge amount of space that he covers, I would talk to the liaison of my neighborhood because I feel like I could get more attention. And he can talk to the Mayor for me and promote my concerns, and the Mayor would listen carefully to him. And I think that after I got the Mayor's attention or the Mayor's staff attention, they would proceed to help create the summit.

DONOFRIO: I personally come from a neighborhood where we're not so privileged to have a liaison to the government like that. However, youths need to understand that really this is their city that they live in, or their town or their township. And that since they're going to be the future, they really have a unique opportunity to stand up and say to city councils, say to the people at your school, say to a local official that is somehow involved in police or fire, say "This is my city. I want to be able to get involved."

Starting something like a youth commission, a youth council is an

opportunity unlike any other because I have realized that there are very few cities who join Columbus and Boston in having a council like this. And having the opportunity to start one is such a great opportunity. I cannot stress enough that it will open doors to the city. It will allow your peers, who maybe do not want to get directly involved, but want to have their voices heard. It becomes a completely open forum for them. And so I would just say stand up and realize this is your city. It's your time to make a change. And so don't be afraid to go to city council and these officials to make that happen.

YOAKUM: I would also suggest that school boards are a good source of support perhaps. Faith-based organizations may also be a great source of support, many of whom have been running youth groups forever. I also believe that you should make use of your community access TV however possible. Ask for an interview with whoever does the little magazine or whatever on the air. There may be some talk show you can tie into to gain some momentum in creating, helping to create -- also, Family and Children First councils are a good source of support. And that's usually a broad-based group representing many segments of the community in terms of looking at how families and youth and children can be supported in succeeding in life.

MCMAHON: My comment might be too that you might look at stuff that cities have to adapt things that will work for their different cities. Everybody is going to do a youth summit, a youth council, whatever they're going to do a little different. And the great part is that as long as a couple of young people can act with adults who want to take and actually give young people a voice, the young people's energy, it really encourages the adults to think about "How can I help these young people?" And it makes a lot more sense to have programs that are generated from teens by teens instead of adults trying to sell programs to teens. And I think that's the part where when cities take initiatives to involve young people, they see that really quick.

On a side note, I'll tell you, John, one of the things that you were talking about earlier -- volunteers -- it's something we were talking about. And we had youth summit volunteers this year that were an awful lot of former youth council members. So to encourage people -- sometimes you have to write a grant and get money, and they say, "What are the outcomes?" With the youth council commissions, you're not going to have outcomes always that are really quick. You've got some short-term and long-term goals. But the fun thing that I'm seeing now is Youth Council members coming back and volunteering once they've gotten out of college and come back home. We also have a lot of different people who have taken jobs in government, not that I've gotten them jobs -- just people that met as volunteers and impressed people, and then later on have been hired by people, including right now the Mayor's speechwriter, his scheduler, his advance person, budget analyst and a couple of different people. So the Mayor thinks the Youth Council is trying to take over. But he knows that this is the whole point of why he wanted to start it was to really encourage people on government service and that it's a good thing to be involved, whether you're going into the non-profit community, you're going to be on a board, you going to be involved in civic things or work in government.

KYLE: Do we have some questions, Crystal?

FACILITATOR: Yes, sir, there are two questions.

KYLE: Okay, let's go to one of those.

FACILITATOR: Your first question comes from the line of Joshua Todd. Your line is open.

QUESTIONER: Hi, this is Joshua Todd with the Multnomah Youth Commission in Portland, Oregon. And my question is actually two parts. One, I'm wondering who is the employer for the coordinators, whether it's a public or non-profit entity. And the reason I ask is because I was just wondering how the youth commissions and youth councils balance their public role with the kind of youth advocacy and trying to push --

YOAKUM: -- Sure, thank you. I am paid through the City of Columbus government. And that is also true -- the agency of the Community Relations Commission, which is under the Mayor's office. And so even though we serve both -- kind of a hybrid -- we serve both the City Council and the Mayor's office in terms of providing in-house consultation, if you will, it's through the Mayor's office that I'm employed.

MCMAHON: I work in the Mayor's office. I come under the Human Services' cabinet. And in Boston, we have a lot of different youth programs and different entities for elderly and things under Human Services. I have worked in the Mayor's office for 17 years and have had to be careful when I'm out in the community whether I'm representing my community hat or my Mayor's hat. And it is delicate sometimes what you're actually doing. With the Youth Council, if I'm doing things with the Youth Council, I'm trying to provide them an opportunity, and I establish with people when I'm in a meeting, I'm speaking on behalf of the Youth Council. If they're off at school and I'm supposed to be in a meeting, I'm speaking on behalf of them and I try to bring them as objective information as I can and I try to walk that fine line. I also sit on boards for the Mayor on different things within the community and with different colleges and different entities. So I think I try to be clear with it when I'm representing myself or the administration or when I'm being a youth advocate, which I think is my primary role.

KYLE: Do the youth members or the youth commissioners or the Youth Council members have any restrictions or guidelines or parameters about their ability to speak out on issues? I mean, here they are, appointed by the Mayor perhaps or serving under some kind of legislative authority as they are in Columbus. If they're taking sides on a particular issue that's before the City Council, is there an issue about that? Or is this encouraged or accepted? Or is there something about it? I think that's part of Josh's question, too.

YOAKUM: Right. David?

DONOFRIO: Sure. Yeah, we actually try to prepare a report since our Youth Commissions' Youth Summit is the biggest event over the year. We prepare a report from that for the Mayor, and that is our basic way of doing that. However we always have a youth commissioner usually sitting in on City Council meetings available for input at any moment from the City Council members. And there are of course other outlets such as the Police on Violence panel, "El Dia de Los Ninos/Day of the Children" events -

- many other events where we can sound off. But we also --

YOAKUM: -- Do you want to talk about ballot issues, David?

DONOFRIO: Sure. We're trying all kinds of new things, though. For example, we're leading on trying to figure out -- for example, from the United States House of Representatives, trying to get our youth opinion on a national level and trying to figure out, find out more about a proposed draft bill that will be coming in the new year as well as HR 163, which is about community service. So we are taking action on that as a commission, and we will be voting, taking a side on that and hopefully more issues. So it's about trying to step out of the box and see where we can go as far as influencing policy.

KYLE: Let's see if we can get another question in here. Do we still have another question waiting, Crystal?

FACILITATOR: Yes, sir. Your next question comes from the line of Penny Wong.

QUESTIONER: Hi, this is Penny. I'm with the City of Stockton Youth Advisory Commission. My question was regarding the entertainment for the youth forums and also the youth summits. Is that decision made by the youth or by the adult advisors?

MCMAHON: In Boston the young people decide what it is that they want to have. Sometimes we have to go help them go find some of the programs that they would like to see. But the only restrictions that we've had on it are I can override any foul language because we're going to put it on cable. So we've had instances where people have tried in sensationalizing in a role play and use swears and if they say it when it is public kind of thing, then we won't put their piece on the cable at all. Not just bleep it -- we won't put the whole thing.

KYLE: But is the youth participating in deciding on the kinds of presentations and entertainment? What about in Columbus?

DONOFRIO: Sure. Yes, I was actually very privileged, again, like I said, involved in the entertainment. And it was us who were in charge of picking that. Obviously we made it a requirement that it had to be positive entertainment. But we had a diverse group of entertainment this year, everything from pop to rock to rap to even in the morning stretch with dance. And so we actually were instrumental in doing that. We made sure that all the commissioners knew -- you know, go to your churches. Go to your schools. Go to community outlets and let people know about this opportunity. And it provided a great way for youth and young entertainers to be able to get participation as far as entertainment. So we actually got to be in charge of that, and it's very empowering and it's very cool for the participants to get their name recognized obviously on TV. It's a great opportunity.

QUESTIONER: And is there a budget for that entertainment?

YOAKUM: It's all volunteer.

DONOFRIO: Yes.

MCMAHON: Yes, we don't have a cost for it either.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MCMAHON: Did Maggie have something else? Because she has things on both things to say and didn't get a chance.

ZACH: In Boston if we have any groups that we know of in our neighborhood or in the city, we can give them -- we have auditions. And it's led by an adult, but all the youth in the council can go to the auditions and give their input.

YOAKUM: We also accepted demo tapes and CDs, etc., this year as well.

ZACH: Yes, we had demo CDs, too.

KYLE: Great, thank you. Any more questions, Crystal?

FACILITATOR: Yes, sir. We have another question from Mayor Chips.

QUESTIONER: This is Mary Chips. I'm in Ava, Missouri. This is a town of about 3,000, and I have here with me Peggy Porter, who is the City Administrator. And you all are leading the way for us. We're working with two youths who couldn't be here today because they're volunteering at an afterschool program. But we're building toward their involvement with city government.

My question was in the youth summits or forums, the adult roles and youth roles specifically -- I heard mentioned workshop providers and in the planning group, and that the adults you'd be tapping would be the people locally who are youth workers, or possible like an inspirational motivational speaker. Could people elaborate a little more on the adults you tapped, and also the roles that the youth and the adults played in actually making this happen? I mean the day of it -- who is doing what?

ZACH: In Boston, usually onstage there is an emcee who is a member of the Youth Council. But there are also some adult speakers who introduce awards. But adults also usually represent different programs at tables. So there is kind of a mixture of adult and youth coordination.

KYLE: But besides being an emcee, Maggie, what other roles are youth doing on the day of the event?

ZACH: Well, youth are always on the stage. So youth will give the skits and they'll give all the presentations and they're the talent. So you don't see much adult participation onstage. And the forum is usually full of just kids, so you don't see too many adults.

KYLE: And just to be clear I think to the audience, I think I understand. These
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skits that you talked about are not entertainment per se, but are ways of getting messages and discussions and issues addressed, right?

ZACH: Right, yeah. We try to have the issues be more entertaining. They usually have a little story line.

KYLE: Right. They're interesting but they're not just entertainment for entertainment's sake.

ZACH: Oh, right.

KYLE: I just wanted to be clear that they got that. David, what about roles of adults versus roles of youth on October 15? I know in your inspirational speaker category, I think one of them was a youth and one of them was an adult. But what else during the day?

DONOFRIO: Sure -- the youth basically are the ones who drive this event. Our youth are basically the ones -- we do the distribution of the food. We have a youth commissioner in each of our breakout sessions to take down the ideas as well as the adult speaker. There is one who actually leads each of the breakout sessions. We also have our youth emcees. Our youth are people in the entertainment category. There are also the people who make sure that everything is running smoothly and help with working entertainment. So much of our event as well is driven by youth.

YOAKUM: Exactly -- and the planning stages as well.

KYLE: I think one of the things we try to do at NLC when we try to do workshops, specifically ones that are geared to youth, is that there are both youth and adult presenters. We're planning a regional conference right now in San Jose in a couple of weeks. And each of those workshops will have youth up front as well as adults up front.

YOAKUM: I think that's important, you know, and I think that's a wonderful opportunity for youth and adults to function as allies in a common cause. We have some wonderful, wonderful people in the youth serving organizations in the Columbus area who are readily available to us whenever we need. It's like, yeah, just give us a call -- we're there. So that's our biggest pool is youth-serving organization, youth leaders, etc.

We also have tapped into faith-based organizations. We have tapped into a little bit of the corporate community. Universities are a great source of our volunteers as well. Some student ambassadors from different universities have been very involved for us in helping with the behind-the-scenes stuff in terms of registration and that kind of thing. And also the information tables -- yes, adults are involved there, usually in promoting a different opportunity.

KYLE: I will take one more question if there is one, Crystal? Is anybody else in line for a question?

FACILITATOR: Yes, sir.

KYLE: Let's take one more, and then while we're doing that, I hope my panel will be thinking about their wrap-up comments and resources that they want to provide as we begin to draw this to a close. Let's take another question.

FACILITATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Penny Wong. Your line is open.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. This is Penny again with Stockton, California Youth Advisory Commission. You continue to share that you utilize faith-based organizations. Do you have specific policy or procedures so that there is not a conflict of interest?

YOAKUM: Absolutely. Yes, and that we made very clear this year. We have utilized a lot of faith-based volunteers. However, if they were providing a workshop, what we said is because we're a government-sponsored agency, we can't have any onsite evangelism or anything like that going on, unfortunately for some folks. And yet that's not been an issue for us. So yes, that does need to be made clear when you're using faith-based volunteers.

KYLE: Great, thanks a lot for the question. Okay, I'd like to go around our panel and wrap up. We've had a good hour here of conversation. We're a few minutes over, but I want to make sure that any one of the four of you has one last burning comment or significant piece of advice, to briefly share that with the rest of us. And also if there is any particular resource or website that Boston or Columbus would like to share. You talked earlier -- I know you've got a website in Boston, and you complimented David on his website, so I know there is one in Columbus as well. Can we start with Boston and Maggie? And Patty, could you give us your wrap-up comments and tell us what that website is?

ZACH: Sure. Our website is www.bostonyouthzone.com/myc. If anybody is interested in our program, I really recommend that you look at it because all of our projects past and present are on there. And it gives a sense of what we're all about.

KYLE: Could you say the website one more time?

ZACH: Sure -- www.bostonyouthzone.com/myc

KYLE: That's "myc" for "Mayor's Youth Council", right?

ZACH: Right.

KYLE: Okay. Anything else from Boston before we --?

MCMAHON: -- I would just say that if you're planning to involve anything with young people in any kind of forum or summit, figure out what the young people -- you know, what opportunities you can give them to start out and have them create from scratch some ideas, even if it starts out small. And build on it and then see what they want to do after that. Keep going back every time after you've done an event, right after and say what

you'd do different next year, and make sure you get those ideas down. And if you have some young people who can be involved from one year to the next, it also provides them continuity for -- we have juniors and seniors, and they're able in their senior year to take on even more of a leadership role. And you see that every year, and it helps make every event stronger.

KYLE: Columbus -- wrap up?

YOAKUM: Go ahead, David.

DONOFRIO: Sure. Our website is columbusyc.homestead.com. That is our youth-created website. And I just wanted to close by saying, again, no matter whether you live in the smallest town in America or the biggest city in America, youth have the power because they are the future to stand up and get their voices heard. This is the biggest opportunity to just get a chance to be involved, whether it's in the school, whether it's in your church, whether it's in the government. Get involved because you do have a voice. The politicians will listen to you if you just take the first step and try to get involved yourself.

KYLE: Can you repeat the website one more time, David?

DONOFRIO: Sure -- columbusyc.homestead.com.

YOAKUM: It's really hard to think about what might be the best thing to wrap up. I'm sitting here listening to Maggie and listening to David and thinking who wouldn't want to work with young people like this? You know, that's part of the challenge of dealing with media's focus on negativity with regards to youth, is that these voices don't get out there as much as they should. You know, these are remarkable young people, and I'm just terribly privileged to be a part of the Columbus Youth Commission and a part of this sort of movement across the United States.

I would just encourage everybody to -- especially those who are planning from scratch perhaps -- to think about who could be the continuity piece in terms of getting some of the gut work done clerically or whatever. That's a critical piece. When you have a youth-driven organization, they have wonderful energy and resources and ideas, and sometimes however, their schedules are so crazy that their ability to hammer out the different paper pieces can be a challenge during their busy days. And so that is really great to identify a volunteer who can do that, or possibly a paid person like us.

KYLE: I think it's been interesting through the years that NLC has been involved in this to see how busy the schedules of the young people are.

YOAKUM: Oh, my!

KYLE: Adults sometimes forget that that's the case. I also just wanted to underscore something that Patty alluded to a couple of different times. The Youth Council in Boston has forged a really great relationship with a local university, Northeastern, and that provides some volunteers. It provides a bus occasionally. It provides some pizza occasionally. So you might think about that in your community.

And she has also got a great relationship with the local chapter of the American Bar Association. So somebody who is interested in legal matters, is interested in helping youth be better citizens, you know, it was two different connections that have been made there that you may want to think about in your own communities. Who could that be? Is it a local fraternity or sorority? Is it a local business group or a local women's group? But I think there are some ways that follows up with Heidi's comment about getting the volunteers to get some of the paperwork done as well as those kinds of other things that have gone on in with Boston.

I want to really sincerely thank our guests from Boston and from Columbus. You've been great participants today. I want to point out a couple of things you can follow up with the National League of Cities. There is an action kit for municipal leaders called "Promoting Youth Participation" and there is a newsletter on youth summits. Both of those are available at the NLC website, www.nlc.org/iyef, and go to the Publications section there and look under youth development and youth leadership and you'll find those. You can download those, make copies of them, maybe get some additional pointers there.

Also if you want to come to our regional conference on promoting youth participation on Saturday, November 13 in San Jose, it's a free conference. You have to get yourself there. I know many of you are in distant parts of the country. But no registration fee. It includes meals. That's also available information on our website.

Our next audioconference will be on December 9 about strengthening families. There will be a new brochure paper on strengthening families -- what cities can do, what neighborhoods can do before that audioconference. If you have not yet signed up for it, you might want to consider that. Or if you're not the right person but somebody else in your city is, you might want to get them to sign up for that audioconference on Thursday, December 9.

Until then, I'm signing off. My name is John Kyle at the National League of Cities. We thank you very much for your participation, all of you listening, all of you talking on our panel. Thanks, David. Thanks, Maggie, Heidi and Patty. Good afternoon and thanks a lot!