

**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION, AND FAMILIES**



**THE E-NEWSLETTER OF NLC'S METLIFE FOUNDATION YOUTH-CITY CONNECTION PROJECT –
PROMOTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION THROUGH A NETWORK OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS AND OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS**

ISSUE 3 – BUILDING EFFECTIVE YOUTH AND ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

MAY/JUNE 2003

Thank you for your interest in promoting youth participation. This e-newsletter is designed for municipal officials, city hall staff, and their community partners in promoting youth participation and civic engagement through youth councils, teen courts, youth service, youth mapping, and appointments of youth to boards and commissions.

NLC NETWORK NEWS

This 3rd edition is being sent to those who have already signed up for the network, as well as others who we think might be interested. **To be sure that you receive future editions**, make sure you have filled out a network registration form (copy attached). Future e-newsletters will discuss themes such as development of youth councils, achieving diverse representation, teen courts, youth mapping, and appointment of youth to boards and commissions. **If you have information to share about related strategies and/or programs in your city or town**, or if you have any other questions or comments about this e-newsletter or the network, contact Rachel Banov at fellow@nlc.org or 202/626-3072.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT: BUILDING EFFECTIVE YOUTH-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

NOTE: Strategy spotlights can help you learn about and implement ideas appropriate for your community. If you have other approaches to share on this issue's topic, please pass them along so we can add them to our database.

Introduction

Adults in more and more cities and towns are working with youth in planning service activities, implementing surveys, making decisions about city youth centers, and/or achieving other goals or projects.

It's easy to see the benefits:

- Adults gain the first-hand experience of how competent young people are and can perceive them as legitimate and critical contributors to the community.
- Young people develop skills as they provide their input on policies that will affect them, and play an active decision-making role in issues that concern them.
- Adults often find that working with youth enhances their commitment and energy.
- Youth gain confidence when trusted adults share with them the power to make decisions.

In addition, these youth-adult partnerships permit organizations and individuals to:

- Develop more sustainable and effective programs.
- Better understand the needs and concerns of youth, and therefore, be able to develop more relevant and responsive programs and services.
- Break down stereotypes about both youth and adults.
- Receive fresh ideas from different perspectives and a broader spectrum of people.

Terry O'Neill, Director, Planning Department, Hampton, Va. – “I think the biggest impact [of hiring two youth planners to work in the city planning department] is just on giving all of us adults a broader perspective. We never used to consider the issues our younger citizens were facing as they related to planning-related issues. As a result, I think we make better decisions ...”

However, it's not always easy for youth and adults to work together in a manner that is effective and comfortable for both age groups. This edition of the e-newsletter is intended to provide assistance in building strong and productive relationships among youth and adults in the community.

Partnership Expectations

Adults must understand that working with youth requires sharing with them some authority to make decisions. In sharing the responsibility to make decisions, adults need to respect and have confidence in young people's judgment. Adults need to recognize youths' assets, understand what the youth can bring to the partnership, and be willing to provide additional training and support when needed. In turn, of course, young people must be responsible in carrying out this shared authority.

Chris Tan, Office on Youth Development, Newport News, Va. – “You're not just asking young people to tell you things and give their opinion. You're asking them to share their opinion, and then you're willing to discuss with them, give your opinion, and come to some agreement or some type of program that you build together.”

Adults who work with youth often choose one of two extremes, according to Cindy Carlson, **Director, Hampton, Va., Coalition for Youth**. Some choose to “abdicate their roles as adults, letting youth make all the decisions, and then wait for them to fail.” Others dominate the activity leaving the youth no room for decision-making. “Adults need to learn to be in the middle,” she says.

For even the most well meaning of adults, learning this middle ground is not easy. Many adults would be happy to engage with youth on this middle ground, according to Patti Panetti, **Rock Hill, S.C., Youth Program Coordinator**. “Most people just don't have a better model [than the extremes].”

Good training for adults, as well as youth, is an essential part of finding this middle ground and building strong working relationships between youth and adults.

Often when adults think about the training that young people need, they might identify presentation skills or leadership skills. Although this general kind of training can be important and helpful, in order to be full partners, young people will also need more “job specific” training to orient them to the specific group or project as well as their role as contributors.

Partnership Preparation and Municipal Government

Newport News, Va. – “It takes time. You have to lay a foundation. You can't just say, ‘I want youth and adult partnerships’ and then go. You have to lay a foundation behind the research, behind statistics that you have, behind doing training. If that foundation is not ready, then those adults who come to the table won't be ready.”

An important role for city officials is to ensure that youth and adults are well prepared to participate in partnership activities. Preparation usually means formal or informal training. Although some adults may resist the idea that they need training, it is essential that both adults and youth build the skills needed to make these partnerships work. These communities offer some ideas of how to infuse training, both formal and informal, for youth and adults into existing or future activities:

For youth councils...

The city of *Claremont, Calif.*, offers an in-service at the beginning of each school year for Teen Committee members and the adults who work with them. The 6-hour training takes place over the course of two days during the after school hours. During this orientation, youth have the opportunity to meet and speak informally with high level city officials such as the city manager. Icebreakers and small group discussions help the youth and adults to become more comfortable with each other. Committee members and adult partners discuss the policy and purpose of the group and share their input and ideas about the work of the committee. All of these aspects of the training help to create a youth-friendly work environment in which participants are comfortable communicating and are clear about roles and expectations.

From the start, it is important to clarify the roles and expectations of adult and youth participants. Each year, the city of *Wausau, Wis.*, holds a one-day training retreat for new youth council members to learn about the youth council, as well as participate in icebreakers, team building, and group activities. During this time, the new youth chairperson explains the background, mission, and activities of the youth council, as well as the responsibilities, expectations, and guidelines for members. Later in the day, the youth brainstorm about their expectations of the mayor and the city council and how adults can be involved with their efforts. The youth also discuss their vision for youth and youth activities in Wausau and develop the year's action plan.

For boards and commissions...

The city of *Boise, Idaho*, appoints young people as voting representatives to almost all boards and commissions. The Healthy Youth*Healthy Community initiative plans to alter existing training so both youth and adults learn more about their respective roles. New training will instruct youth on the boards' formal procedures as well as purpose and history. It will also aim to boost youth confidence, build communication skills, and improve their interaction skills with adults. Training for adult board members is aimed at helping them to understand the value of youth participation, to communicate with youth, and to mentor youth who are on their commission.

RESOURCES

1. The **Center for Youth as Resources** is a national nonprofit organization promoting local Youth as Resources (YAR) efforts in communities around the country. YAR recognizes youth as valuable community resources and engages them as partners with adults in bringing about positive community change. The three principles of YAR are youth-adult partnership in governance, youth as grantmakers, and youth-led service. Community-based YAR programs, governed by youth and adults, provide grants to young people to design and carry out service projects. The youth and adults work together to solicit and evaluate project proposals from local youth. To learn more, go to <http://www.yar.org/>, email yar@cyar.org, or call 202/261-4131.
2. The **Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development** works to develop the potential of youth, adults, organizations, and communities in working together to create a just and equitable society. The **Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships** curriculum offers step-by-step tools to prepare youth and adults to work as a team. It leads youth and adults through activities to challenge preconceptions, explore benefits, assess readiness, and build trust to strengthen their partnership efforts. Go to <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/product.asp> to order this or other products. For more information, call 301/961-2837, or visit <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/>, or e-mail info@theinnovationcenter.org.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE: Making Youth and Adult Partnerships Work in Newport News, VA

Two and a half years ago, the city of Newport News, Va., created its first Office on Youth Development. Recently, NLC spoke with Sung Kim, Chair of the Newport News Mayor's Youth Commission, and Chris Tan, Research, Evaluation, and Training Specialist in the Office on Youth Development about their city's experience in implementing youth-adult partnerships. Below are excerpts from this interview.

What barriers has your community faced in implementing youth-adult partnerships?

Chris: Probably the greatest barrier is attitude. The underlying tone is that we are there to care for young people and to provide for young people. Certainly, it's important that we take on responsibilities and make sure that young people are safe, etc. It's also our responsibility to prepare them to become good citizens and part of that is asking for their input.

Sung: Some adults have this attitude that "wow, this is a high school kid, he's pretty smart, that's really cute." Although most adults are genuinely welcoming of youth perspectives, I feel like others are doing an injustice to their position and to the community by not taking full advantage of what youth can offer.

Chris: Another barrier is "youth participation" itself. Young people are so used to being participants and used to being directed that it's difficult when we tell them that we want to hear what they have to say. We've never had a problem getting young people to come, but it's a larger problem to get them to stay involved and to participate at a greater level than they're used to, such as to speak and present.

How can training be used to overcome these challenges?

Chris: Re-framing how they think about young people is a focus of adult training. We ask them about the positive aspects of their relationships with adults when they were young and almost every time they say, "they listened to me." We also try to get them to see that youth participation is valuable, but we don't need just participants in activities; we also try to get them to focus on their advisory and leadership abilities.

For young people, training is more of a gradual process. We slowly introduce them to different and increasing levels of participation, which require greater commitment and skill. We don't ask them to take on roles they're not ready for.

Sung: I don't think it's a lost cause if we don't see people that right away understand the concept of youth and adults working together. I think that we need to be willing to make a long-term commitment to be able to develop the characteristics and values that youth can bring to the table.

I also think that the more visible that our youth can get – sitting on commissions and doing work of that nature – the more that adults will realize that people need to look to youth-adult partnerships with an open mind.

What strategies were successful in getting city councilmembers to support youth development?

Chris: I think a lot of the things we did were based on doing a [youth developmental] assets survey and assessment of our community. We did it in a 3-fold process. The first was to do the survey so that city councilmembers could have tangible evidence of what assets we have right now, what are some things we may want to work on, what are some things young people are telling us that we aren't supplying, and what are some things that we are doing really well.

The second step was doing the youth mapping project, where we had young people go out into the community and map all the opportunities. From there we could see the gaps between the number of assets that children had and the number of opportunities that they had in the city. I think over time – by doing it in a process where first you map the assets, then map the opportunities, and then show the gaps – it made it less of a theory and more practical. It made sense.

[In addition]...doing trainings consistently with everybody [is important]. We went to City Council and did presentations on positive youth development. In doing so, the city councilmembers saw this as more than just a fluffy theory.

Contact: Chris Tan by phone at 757/597-2801, or by e-mail at ctan@ci.newport-news.va.us.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Cities and towns face common challenges in implementing youth-adult partnerships. This FAQ list can assist your community in thinking about how to approach some common hurdles. Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Approaches listed here may or may not work in your community or may need to be modified.

1. How can I get young people to attend our meetings?

- **Look at how meetings are scheduled** – To involve youth, planners will need to accommodate young people’s schedules...often by planning meetings for nontraditional times, such as late afternoon, early evening, or on the weekend. Adults regularly consult others’ calendars in setting meeting dates; in working with youth, adults must show the same consideration. In *Newport News, Va.*, adults often “schedule meetings around young people time,” which often means they must work flexible hours and participate in meetings that begin at 5:00 PM.
- **Have youth-friendly meetings** – To incorporate young people into meetings, it’s important to do more than simply invite them. Think about how you can give meetings a more youth-friendly atmosphere and format so that youth will feel comfortable. For example, involve multiple young people, agree on respectful norms for group members, establish a comfort level by smiling and laughing, use icebreakers to get to know one another, provide food if the meeting is during a mealtime, and offer different ways to express oneself (e.g., opportunities to talk, draw, or write to accommodate different personal preferences).
- **Choose meeting locations carefully** – Consider how youth will get to meetings. Will they need bus fares, carpools? Is it in a central location, or will some youth be unwilling or unable to get there? The *Indianapolis, Ind.*, Mayor’s Youth Council considered varying the meeting locations, but ultimately decided to hold all of them at city hall due to its central location.
- **Offer training for youth** – Just like adults, youth have stereotypes or viewpoints about adults that might affect their attitudes and ability to interact effectively with adults. Consider hiring a facilitator to work with both youth and adults, or planning activities to build communication and relationship skills. A youth participant at a recent NLC meeting said, “This partnership work does not come easy to either partner or age group.” Youth know that they need to do some skill building to succeed in these partnerships.

Youth participant, NLC meeting of youth and adults – “Consider our schedules. Hold meetings at youth-friendly times to accommodate school and activities.”

2. How can we enable adults in our community to view youth as resources?

- **Offer training for adults** – Viewing youth as resources is an essential component of a successful youth-adult partnership. In offices or organizations that have always operated solely from an adult perspective, staff may need training in how to work with young people. Youth at a recent NLC-sponsored meeting stated that in order to work effectively with youth, “Adults should be open-minded. Adults should respect us and be our friend. Meaningful relationships will increase our trust.” Adults will often require training for this to occur.
- **Educate the public** – Adults’ attitudes and views of youth can affect their ability to find young peoples’ opinions credible. These perceptions may also determine the extent to which adults involve youth as significant partners. In *Fountain Hills, Ariz.*, the youth council publishes positive articles about young people in the town’s weekly newspaper, which is read by everyone in the community. The youth of *Caldwell, Idaho*, have developed a standard presentation for civic groups (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce), highlighting youth council accomplishments.

- **Carry out strategic outreach** – One way to reach adults is to target specific groups of adults as opposed to targeting adults as a whole. For example, if the business community is a powerful ally in your city, you may consider doing special outreach to local businesses through articles in the Chamber of Commerce newsletter. The *Boise, Idaho*, Healthy Youth* Healthy Community Initiative has done special youth development training with youth sports coaches. They hope to target the business community in future efforts.

In *Tucson, Ariz.*, the library was the recipient of a 3-year youth development grant. Thanks to the grant, library staff received some excellent youth development training. The library staff indicated that the training greatly enhanced the library and its ventures into creating a more youth-friendly library environment. For example, one impressive result was that a section of the library was designed entirely by youth.

3. *How do we get young people to contribute in discussions with adults?*

- **Involve youth early and often** – Adults need to be careful that they are not the ones who design, implement, and run programs, and then incorporate youth only as an afterthought, or as “tokens” of youth participation. In a true partnership, both youth and adults have the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions, and the contribution of each is recognized and valued. Says Chris Tan, “You’re in a partnership through the entire process from beginning to end...I think we often use young people in the middle or at the end when we finally come up with it. They really need to be there from planning, to implementation, and through evaluation.”
- **Use effective communication** – Communication can be a stumbling block in any partnership, especially between youth and adults. Be open and nonjudgmental about young people’s suggestions. Let them know their involvement is important, and ask them for their input from the start. Communication-focused group activities with youth and adult leaders can prevent miscommunication and build an understanding between partners. Youth in *Des Moines, Iowa*, learned that they could communicate more effectively with their city councilmembers when they sat in a mixed group in a circle, instead of sitting in separate groups opposite one another.
- **Provide training and orientation** – In order for youth to fully participate as team members, it is essential that they receive training to acclimate them both to the content and to the environment of their new role. In *Fountain Hills, Ariz.*, the youth member of the Parks and Recreation Commission receives an orientation along with the new adult commission member. In addition, the vice chair of the commission acts as a mentor to the youth member. Without such training and mentoring, youth in these partnerships tend to feel used rather than empowered.

Lauren, Youth Commissioner, Parks and Recreation Commission, Fountain Hills, Ariz.– “The vice chair is an experienced person ... if I ever have any questions I just ask the vice chair, and she’s willing to take the time to help me out ... the adults want you there, they want to hear from you, and they like when you ask questions.”

4. *How can we get our city officials to come on board?*

- **Hold trainings and presentations** – Having the support of local elected officials can be a critical part of getting youth participation on the citywide agenda, both in government and non-government settings. In *Newport News, Va.*, city officials were one of the groups that received training on youth development. In *Des Moines, Iowa*, the Youth Council impressed their city officials by giving a PowerPoint presentation on the outcomes of a countywide youth summit.
- **Encourage youth interaction with adults** – Adults are often impressed with the abilities and intentions of young people when they meet teenagers who articulate meaningful ideas and suggestions. These first-hand interactions are often successful in swaying municipal officials and other adults who are skeptical of youth participation. At a youth summit in *Fremont, Calif.*, after

listening to one young man articulate his concerns about the value the city placed on its youth, a city councilmember offered the youth a sizeable slot on the council's agenda to make a presentation. The Youth Council in *Caldwell, Idaho*, was asked to appoint a youth liaison to the local Chamber of Commerce after the youth council made a presentation to the Chamber.

- **Collect data** – Data collection is often thought of in terms of public education and test scores. However, data collection about the status of youth can be compelling and move communities to action. In *Tulare, Calif.*, survey results showing that 79% of high school students felt they did not have a voice in what happened in Tulare led to more city opportunities for youth leadership and to the creation of the Teens-On-Board program, in which youth representatives serve on city boards and commissions. In *Fountain Hills, Ariz.*, the city identified youth participation as a priority because young people are the fastest growing segment of the community.

Terry O'Neill, Director, Planning Department, Hampton, Va. – “The youth planners are changing adults’ perceptions of young people in our community. The youth planners are real role models and due to their job, are highly visible in the community. Many adults form opinions about young people based on limited contact and information. The youth planners demonstrate the character, passion, and concern that many young people have.”

5. How do we find and fund training for youth and adults?

- **Use existing city resources** – Ask city departments, such as the human resources department, if they offer orientations, trainings, manuals, etc. that could be used or modified for the youth.
- **Find help in the community** – Locate facilitators and speakers from local universities, colleges, nonprofits, or community foundations who might be willing to work with your group at low or no cost. A local business school professor supported the *Rock Hill, S.C.*, youth council by presenting her national research at their forum with community business leaders, to correspond with the survey the youth council conducted regarding how Rock Hill youth spend their money. Through a partnership with Northeastern University, the Youth Council in *Boston, Mass.*, receives in-kind donations (e.g., buses for trips), as well as assistance with special projects.
- **Look at national opportunities** – In particular, organizations such as the Youth Leadership Institute (www.yli.org); Prudential Youth Leadership Institute (www.pyli.org); Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (www.innovationcenter.org/); and Onsite-Insights (www.onsiteinsights.com) offer group training or sell training curricula and products.
- **Apply for grants** – Search for applicable grants that could provide you with the necessary resources to accomplish your goals. Consider applying for grants offered by local and national organizations and foundations, as well as through various federal grant programs.
- **Consider asking youth to be fundraisers** – The city of *Fremont, Calif.*, recently held its first “Teens Taking Action Leadership Conference,” during which some youth received training in fundraising and grant writing.

Robin Michel, Adult Advisor, Fremont, Calif. – “After the day of workshops, one group of teens had actually drafted a grant proposal that they plan to submit through their schools in the fall.”

Share information with NLC about your local efforts, so we can spotlight your activities and best practices in a future e-newsletter. Include information about activities, website, brochures, reports, etc. that you think network participants will find useful. And, photos are worth a thousand words ... we can use them in the e-newsletter or in NLC's weekly newspaper, *Nation's Cities Weekly*. Contact Rachel Banov at 202/626-3072 or fellow@nlc.org.

Network on Municipal Leadership for Youth Participation

Please complete this registration form and survey to participate in the Network, which will provide information to – and encourage exchange among – participating municipal officials, staff, and other community leaders.

Name _____ Title _____
 Department/Organization Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-Mail _____ Website _____
 Name of City _____ Population _____

1. **In what areas does your municipality have programs or initiatives in place that involve/promote youth participation? In what areas do you hope to begin or expand work in the next year? In what areas would you like assistance?**
Check all that apply. Also, please send us written information or websites that describe current (or planned) efforts in your city or town, especially those you would consider models for other communities.

	<u>Current Activity</u>	<u>New/Expanded Activity</u>	<u>Would Like Help</u>
Local governance/city department (e.g. bureau, agency, commission on youth issues)	_____	_____	_____
Advisory body composed of youth (e.g. Mayor's Youth Council, Parks & Rec Teen Advisory Board)	_____	_____	_____
Youth serving on municipal boards or commissions	_____	_____	_____
Committee assembled for a special event or issue (e.g. skateboard park development committee)	_____	_____	_____
Youth mapping of city services or assets	_____	_____	_____
City sponsored youth summit	_____	_____	_____
Opportunities for youth service	_____	_____	_____
Youth staff or interns in a city department (e.g. Parks and Recreation, Planning)	_____	_____	_____
Training/education of adults about involving youth in decision-making	_____	_____	_____
Teen courts	_____	_____	_____
Other (please describe):	_____	_____	_____

2. **Would you be willing to serve as a resource to other cities interested in learning more about youth participation initiatives and programs in your city?**

by phone?: Yes No /// by e-mail?: Yes No /// in workshops, etc.?: Yes No

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Fax your completed form to: Rachel Banov, NLC Institute for Youth, Education, & Families at 202/626-3043.

Or, e-mail to: fellow@nlc.org. Or, mail to Rachel Banov, NLC, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004.

Questions? Call Rachel at 202/626-3072.

7/03