



Congressional City Conference – March 2011 Youth Delegates Information

The National League of Cities encourages the participation of youth (15-18 years old) in the Congressional City Conference on March 12-16, 2011.

Nothing is more important to the health of our democracy than the active engagement of young people in representative government at the local level. In turn, this engagement promotes the full and healthy development of youth.

At the Congressional City Conference, youth delegates will have the opportunity to learn how federal policy and legislation affects their own cities and towns. They will also learn about NLC's legislative priorities for the year, have the chance to be a part of important dialogue, and gain information they can use for discussion and action at home.

Through civic engagement – including attendance at this conference – young people gain experience; acquire new skills; learn responsibility and accountability; develop a greater sense of confidence, empowerment, and membership; and forge meaningful connections to other youth and adults.

Municipal officials in communities large and small are taking steps to ensure that youth have a voice and a role in local government. You and your community can be part of this process by having youth delegates from your city attend the Congressional City Conference.

See the attached documents for an overview of what youth delegates can expect and for advice to both the youth and their adult chaperones.

This document includes:

- [Ways for Youth to Participate](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Making the Most of the Congressional City Conference: Advice for Youth](#)
- [Making the Most of Congressional City Conference: Advice for Chaperones](#)
- [Tentative Schedule](#)

All sessions will be held at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington D.C.

For questions or more information about the youth delegate activities at the Congressional City Conference contact Leon Andrews at andrews@nlc.org or (202) 626-3039 or Denise Duvernay at duvernay@nlc.org or (202) 626-3120.

Revised: 01/11

Ways for Youth to Participate

The focus of the Congressional City Conference is to provide technical and substantive information to municipal officials that will support their work with all branches of the federal government, especially in terms of lobbying on priority issues identified by NLC's leadership and policy committees.

Youth ages 15-18 years are welcome to attend any and all sessions listed in the program. Please note that although the conference does not include a "youth track," the conference program includes a few sessions designed specifically for youth delegates.

Youth may enjoy the opportunity to:

- Hear top officials of the Administration and prominent members of Congress make public comments on issues of importance to cities and towns. (Please visit the NLC website and *Nation's Cities Weekly* newspaper for updated information on speakers.)
- Learn about the federal advocacy priorities of municipal officials from across the country.
- Be exposed to, and take part in, the federal advocacy process.
- Network with other youth delegates and municipal officials from around the country.
- Take advantage of Washington, D.C., and learn about our nation's capital.

Before choosing to attend, youth and chaperones should consider that:

- There are only a few youth-focused events being held at the conference.
- Many of the workshops and meetings are technical in nature and discuss policies which may be unfamiliar and complicated.
- In general, the workshops will not offer program items focused on local issues. More typically, a workshop would discuss specific components of federal legislation that can be related to local communities.

This conference is different from NLC's Congress of Cities held in November, which has plenary sessions and extensive workshops on general interest topics. For this reason, more youth chose to attend the November conference.

For those who choose to attend the March Congressional City Conference, chaperones should prepare youth before the conference so that they can follow the topics more easily, learn how they connect to their hometown, and understand why there are fewer workshops related directly to youth issues or to implementing local programs.

Conference Agenda

NLC leadership meetings and trainings dominate the Congressional City Conference agenda for much of Saturday and Sunday. Monday and Tuesday are composed of general sessions and preparatory workshops, which feature speakers including NLC leaders, local elected officials, and national experts. Wednesday is typically a day that municipal officials spend lobbying on Capitol Hill. It is suggested that youth delegates and chaperones focus their energy on the Sunday through Tuesday program. Any youth who stay over until Wednesday may wish to arrange to accompany their local officials to Capitol Hill to see various members of Congress.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Should youth attend this conference?

Yes. This conference offers a valuable opportunity for youth to learn more about local government and the federal legislative process. In addition, youth offer a unique perspective to the municipal leaders at the conference. Youth delegates will interact with and learn from both youth and adults.

In addition to these frequently asked questions, be sure to review the conference brochure and the “Advice for Youth,” and “Advice to Adults” sections of this document before deciding which youth from your city should attend. More conference details are available at:

http://www.nlc.org/CONFERENCES_EVENTS/congressional_city_conference/index.aspx.

2. What activities are included for youth at conference?

The Congressional City Conference is primarily a conference for municipal officials to which youth are invited as full delegates and representatives of their communities. As such, there is no special youth track. Youth attend the same workshops, meetings, and general sessions as local elected officials. Please see the conference program for further details on these events. However, there will be a few “youth-focused” sessions, including an orientation session to provide youth with an overview of the conference and its sessions, as well as a youth and local elected officials networking event.

3. How many youth usually attend this conference?

Each year, we expect approximately 50-100 youth to attend this conference.

4. Is there an age restriction?

Youth must be 15-18 years old and/or sophomores, juniors, or seniors in high school to participate as youth delegates. They receive a “youth delegate ribbon” and a conference registration bag, and they are eligible to participate in the youth delegate events as well as all other events open to conference delegates.

Youth under age 15 are not considered youth delegates. They may be attending the conference with their parents, but they are not considered youth delegates and will not receive conference bags or yellow youth delegate ribbons and are not eligible to participate in youth delegate events.

5. How many youth can each city bring?

We suggest bringing at least two youth, as it is often easier for youth to take advantage of this conference if they are with another peer from their city. You may want to bring at least one adult chaperone for every five youth.

6. Who is responsible for the youth delegates at the Congress of Cities?

The adult chaperone or city official bringing the youth is responsible for the youth throughout the entire conference.

7. Who should be a chaperone?

We encourage local elected officials to be chaperones when possible, which will build solid relationships between the youth and these leaders. When this is not possible, city staff responsible for the local youth council or senior parks and recreation staff are examples of the city leaders who could be chaperoning the youth delegates.

8. What are the roles of the youth delegate and the adult bringing the youth delegate?

Youth delegates come to this conference as representatives of their municipality. Youth participate fully in workshops and general sessions – listening, asking questions, and on occasion serving as panelists. They network with each other and provide perspectives to adults. The hope is that they will leave the conference with a better understanding of how cities operate and with ideas about how to improve their communities upon returning home.

For adults, supporting young people's participation means not only arranging logistics, like making sure they get on the plane on time, but also providing support and encouragement of their participation. One step chaperones may take is to facilitate a meeting between the youth and the local officials who are in attendance.

Other tips: Go through the conference program together before arriving on-site, debrief with youth and adults at the end of each day, and encourage youth to speak up throughout the conference.

9. What is the registration fee for youth?

Youth delegates between the ages of 15 and 18 receive a discounted registration fee of \$100.

10. What is the registration fee for chaperones?

Chaperones who would not otherwise attend the conference receive a discounted registration fee of \$100. This discounted fee is not available to elected officials, city managers, or others who would ordinarily attend the conference.

11. Is there a youth rate for hotel accommodations?

There is no special hotel rate for youth, although allowing youth to share rooms, in accordance with hotel guidelines, may help to reduce the cost. For more information, please contact J. Spargo & Associates Inc., the agency managing housing and registration, at (888)319-3864 or (703)449-6418.

12. How can cities pay for sending youth to this conference?

Each year, communities use a number of strategies to pay for youth delegates' attendance at the Congressional City Conference. Some cities allocate municipal funds. In return, youth delegates may present their conference experience and what they learned to the city council. Other cities request support from businesses, the school district, or civic groups (such as the League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, or Rotary Club). Some state municipal leagues will provide scholarships for youth delegates. Parents and youth also help defray costs through donations and/or fundraising activities such as car washes and bake sales.

Making the Most of the Congressional City Conference: Advice for Youth

What is the Congressional City Conference?

This is a legislative conference where general sessions and workshops will focus on the details of specific bills to be considered in Congress this year and other matters about the priorities of the Administration and Congress. Speakers may include members of Congress and/or the Cabinet – maybe even the President of the United States. These sessions are different from the workshops at NLC’s Congress of Cities held in November that focus on ideas and programs that folks can implement at home.

Is there a youth track?

There will **NOT** be a youth track. However, there will be a Youth Delegates Orientation and a few other youth-specific sessions between Sunday and Tuesday of the conference. Otherwise, youth attend the same sessions that adults attend.

What are youth delegates expected to do at this conference?

Youth delegates are expected to participate in conference sessions along with adult delegates. Introduce yourself to other youth and adult delegates. Speak up during big group sessions; adult participants and your peers want to hear what you have to say. Ask questions during panels, particularly if something is unclear. Although this may feel awkward if there aren’t many young people around, other youth, your chaperone, and other adults will support you.

Will I have the chance to speak with local elected officials?

Yes! During workshops, meetings and in hallways, feel free to introduce yourself. Here are some tips:

1. Ask your chaperone to arrange meetings with local elected officials from your city. Even if you already know them and meet with them regularly, this conference is a special opportunity to connect and discuss issues of concern while you are both away from the duties of your everyday lives.
2. Each state has a state municipal league, which represents municipalities in that state. Seek out and attend appropriate state league events, such as welcome receptions. What better opportunity to educate city officials about youth participation?
3. Exchanging city pins and business cards is a great way to strike up a conversation with a city official; many city officials have city pins and will be glad to share with you. See if your city has a city pin, and if you can take a supply to use for trading. Use the backs of business cards to write any notes about the person you may forget.

How am I supposed to do this all by myself?!

You’re not; be a team! Being visible and making friends all the time is hard work. Sit next to your fellow youth delegates and encourage each other to speak up. Remember you are part of a team and that you can depend on each other. Reach out to your chaperones or NLC staff as resources and advocates when you need it. It will be useful to get together as a group at least once a day (with other youth or adults from your city or with your new friends) to share highlights and talk about how your day has gone.

What is the dress code?

The dress is “business casual.” Suits are not required. For both girls and boys, wear slacks instead of jeans; sweaters are fine. Because it may be warm in the convention center and chilly outside, dressing in layers is a good idea.

Will I need money?

Lunch will be provided on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Breakfast will also be provided on Monday. Find out which expenses like taxis or food will be covered by your sponsoring city or organization. Save receipts because you may need them. Bring some cash for personal spending money.

Making the Most of Congressional City Conference: Advice for Chaperones

How is this conference different from the NLC's Congress of Cities in November?

This is a legislative conference where general sessions and workshops will focus on the details of specific bills to be considered in Congress this year and legislative priorities of cities, the Administration and Congress. These sessions are different from the workshops at the Congress of Cities that focus on ideas and programs that local officials can implement at home. Youth who attend this conference should be interested in learning about advocacy and a broad array of federal policy issues.

Is there a youth track?

There will **NOT** be a youth track. However, there will be a Youth Delegates Orientation and several other youth-specific sessions between Sunday and Tuesday of the conference. Otherwise, youth attend the same sessions that adults attend.

How can I help the youth delegates to take advantage of conference sessions?

With such a full schedule and complex sessions, we would suggest finding time with your team of youth to:

- Review the program as a team.
- Talk about what will go on at the conference
- Compile questions about the National League of Cities.
- Explain the agenda.
- Discuss how you and the youth can use what you learn at the conference when you get back home or back to school.
- Attend the Youth Delegates Orientation session, which will help you and the youth to get a better understanding of the conference.

Will the youth be able to meet with their elected officials?

As the chaperones, it is your responsibility to help coordinate meetings among youth and their elected officials. Connecting youth with their municipal officials helps them better understand the meaning of the conference and how it relates to efforts they are making to improve their hometown. These connections can be an informal meeting, a meal together, or the opportunity to accompany the local officials to a workshop. If possible, arrange times for these connections before leaving home. The large conference attendance may make it difficult to run into each other.

What else can I do to support the full participation of youth delegates?

Whether you are a chaperone, an adult official, or a staff person coordinating opportunities for young people, you have a special role to play. Here are some tips:

1. Be a good listener. You may have the opportunity to hear what youth really think about the conference. For many of them, the world of suits and agendas is a totally different environment from what they are used to. This may make it hard for youth to feel comfortable right away. As a caring adult, they may come to you with frustrations or other issues. Don't take comments personally. Take advantage of this as an opportunity to get closer to them.
2. Support young people in being visible. In an adult-oriented environment, it can really be intimidating for young people to be outgoing. Keep asking them what they think, and encourage them to support each other. Sit by them during workshops, and remind them that it is important that they speak up about issues of importance to them. At the same time, provide opportunities for them to be independent (e.g., choosing and attending workshops on their own).

This advice for youth and adults is based on material prepared by Youth on Board (www.youthonboard.org). Additional information on youth civic engagement can be found in NLC's action kit, "Promoting Youth Participation" available at http://www.nlc.org/IYEF/youthdevelopment/youth_participation/resources.aspx.

All youth ages 15-18 who participate in the 2011 Congressional City Conference may have additional opportunities to provide advice to NLC during the course of the year, receive information from NLC occasionally, work toward the establishment of youth councils in local communities, and interact with each other on matters of common interest.

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