YOUTH IN GOVERNANCE
STAFF & VOLUNTEER TIPSHEET

How to use this document

This tipsheet offers strategies and tools for youth development professionals who are planning and facilitating Youth in Governance programming. It includes sample learning outcomes, potential barriers to participation, recommended teaching resources, and links to evaluation tools.

What is Youth in Governance programming?

Youth in Governance programming involves youth and adults working together in positions of authority to make decisions and take action to strengthen organizations, communities, and our democratic society.

Benefits & Values

These programs benefit youth, communities, and governments by supporting community improvement and civic development.

They also supports Extension's positive youth development values:

- youth voice
- youth-adult partnership
- youth engagement.

Examples of Youth in Governace programs

Youth in Governance programs can take many different forms, including youth participating in **government**, **organizational boards** and **committees**. Youth may also participate in **restorative justice teen court** programs or on **youth boards**. Check out our Youth in Governance website to read more about specific examples of Youth in Governance programming!

Customizing your program

As you plan to train youth and/or adults to participate in these programs, you may identify **different training needs**. Based on these needs, you might include a variety of program components.

Because programs and groups are different, this guide is not one-size-fits-all. Instead, **take what is most relevant to your program and your participants**.

Sample Learning Outcomes

Below are some possible learning objectives/outcomes that you can use to plan your Youth in Governance programming. We recommend choosing 2-3 to focus on:

- Youth and adults will **create a welcoming and supportive environment** in order to engage youth voice and involvement.
- Youth will **understand the government structures** they're involved in and **explain their role in those structures** in order to connect their learning to their experience.
- Youth will **learn and apply leadership skills**, such as public speaking, perspective-taking, critical thinking, and decision-making, in order to actively participate in the governing process.
- Youth will **learn and apply civic skills,** such as achieving group goals, social skills, contacting public officials, and organizing meetings in order to actively participate in the governing process.
- Youth will **build social networks and social capital** in order to feel connected to and empowered in their community.
- Youth will **identify and lead a community service project** in order to practice leadership skills and create positive change in their community.
- Adults will **act as mentors to youth members** in order to support a growth mindset and build confidence in the youth.

When choosing your learning outcomes, ask yourself:

- Which of these learning objectives/outcomes meet an identified need in your community?
- What program elements might be needed to achieve these objectives/outcomes?

Barriers to Youth Participation

Many youth may face barriers to participating fully in Youth in Governnace programming. Take some time to reflect on these common barriers and how you might strive to overcome them in your program:

- **Limited early experiences**. When having experience is overemphasized, youth may not see a place for themselves.
- **Scheduling conflicts.** Meetings are often scheduled during the day while youth are at school or work.
- **Voice in meetings**. Youth voice may only be prioritized when the issue relates directly to youth. They should have a voice even when that's not the case.
- **Diversity gaps between younger and older generations**. Whether real or perceived, the gap between identities and experiences of different age groups can limit recruitment.
- **Transportation**. Youth don't always have reliable transportation to and from meetings, especially at certain times of day.
- **Under-sampling**. In many communities, the same youth are chosen for a variety of leadership opportunities, giving them disproportionate chances to build their skills.
- **Stereotypes and assumptions**. Adults may assume youth apathy rather than assuming that youth wish to get involved.
- **Lack of early meaningful participation**. Youth often report being asked to give feedback on a certain set of solutions identified by adults rather than being engaged in identifying solutions.

When working with barriers, ask yourself:

- Are there ways that youth can take a leadership role in helping to overcome these barriers?
- What other barriers may exist that are specific to your community?

YOUTH IN GOVERNANCE RESOURCES

These resources can be used to support youth and their adult mentors in Youth in Governance programming. This list of resources is not a comprehensive collection of what is available. Rather, it is a starting point for recommended resources.

ADULT MENTOR TRAINING RESOURCES

These resources have been recommended through the Curriculum Jams process for supporting adult mentors.

Preparing for mentorship

While adults participating in Youth in Governance likely already have strong leadership skills and abilities, working with youth may be new to them. They may not know how to support youth in their new roles and may not be aware of the socialized bias they may hold about young people (adultism). Raising adults' awareness of how to support, engage, and include youth helps create a safer and more welcoming environment for both youth and adults.

Growth Mindset for Mentors

A 1-hour virtual training for adults learning how to work with youth as mentors.

https://www.mindsetkit.org/growth-mindset-mentorsdepartments.

Youth Empowerment Solutions - Multicultural

Materials free with login.

https://yes.sph.umich.edu/curriculum/download/

- Session 4.1: Adultism and Working with Adults (pages 129-132)

Developing youth–adult partnerships

Providing training for youth and adults together can strengthen their skills and help build stronger, more collaborative relationships. When there is time or opportunity, training around youth–adult partnerships is beneficial. Many of these activities can be adapted to be done in a shorter time (10-15 minutes) if needed.

Youth-Adult Partnerships: a Training Manual

Free download. https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Youth-Adult-Partnerships-A-Training-Manual.pdf

- Where are You Going? A Youth-Adult Partnership Self-Assessment Tool (page 28)
- Picture-Perfect Partnership (page 36)
- Intergenerational Sharing (page 38)
- Section Two: Foundations for Youth-Adult Partnerships (pages 44-97)
- Identifying Barriers to Effective Partnerships (pages 94-96)
- The 20/80 Rule (page 102)
- What's your role? (page 159)
- Talking it Over: Learning to Give and Receive Feedback (page 166)

YOUTH TRAINING RESOURCES

Understanding systems

Youth in Governance is a new and different level of leadership for young people. Until this experience, they have been on the receiving end of what governments, boards, or other leadership groups offer. It is essential to help youth **understand the system(s) in which they'll be operating** to help them see the bigger picture and their new place in it.

iCivics

English- and Spanish-language materials free with login. https://www.icivics.org/curriculum/state-and-local-governments

County Basics webquest: a worksheet that students can complete to identify basic information about their county.

The Capable County lesson: a lesson to establish basic understandings about counties, including Dillon's Rule and Home Rule.

Counties Work game: an online game and discussion guide that helps students learn about different parts of county governance.

Counties Work Extension Pack: a teacher guide including pre- and post-activities to extend the impact of the Counties Work game.

County Contributions infographic: a visual guide to different departments.

Youth Empowerment Solutions - Multicultural version

Materials free with login.

Session 4.1: Adultism and Working with Adults (pages 129-132)

Building skills

Relational and communication skills are foundational to youth experiences in their new roles. Without them, youth may feel isolated and unsupported and may not know how to ask for what they need. Building these skills, as well as other leadership skills such as decision-making and problem-solving, gives them a strong start toward growing their network.

Youth-Adult Partnerships: a Training Manual

Free download.

- Talking it Over: Learning to Give and Receive Feedback (page 166)

Youth Engaged in Learning about Leadership (YELL)

Free download. https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/college-career-and-civic-readiness/youth-engaged-leadership-and-learning-yell-handbook

Unit 1: Communication
- Active Listening (pages 34-39)
- Working as a Team (pages 40-49)
- Speaking and Presenting (pages 50-57)
- Facilitation (pages 58-67)

Unit 2: Leadership (pages 104-127)
Lessons explore leadership through values, personal assets, youth roles, and power dynamics.
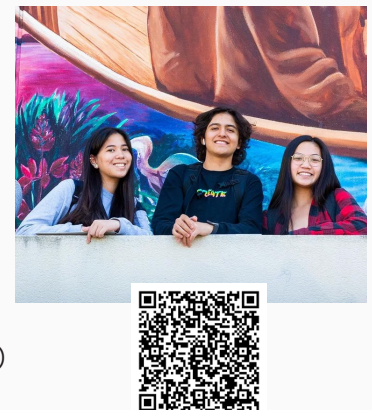
Sample Evaluation Tools

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM):

Use Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) to:

- Look at how the work that has been done has made a difference in the community

- Use that information to think about what we can learn from the work

- Decide how to evaluate the information more deeply (if needed) and plan next steps

REM resources:

- REM How-to Guide

- Ripple Effects Mapping: When to use ripple effect mapping as a data collection method (video – 1:58)

- Ripple Effects Mapping: Tips for implementing ripple effects mapping (video – 4:22)

- Ripple Effects Mapping: A case study about a project when ripple effect mapping was used (video – 3:02)

ABOUT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

This information was developed through UW-Madison Extension's Curriculum Jams process. Curriculum Jams bring together people with lived experience to review and recommend learning resources.

Check out our website to learn more! youthdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/curriculum-jams

REFERENCES:

Calvert, M., De Montmollin, J., & Winnett, T. (2015). Youth Representation on County Government Committees: Youth in Governance in Kenosha County, Wisconsin. The Journal of Extension, 53(6), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.53.06.03

Liphart, Doug; Klemme, Neil James; and Meeker, Ian (2022) "Civic Engagement and Advocacy in Rural Wisconsin: Youth Development Through Legislative Forums," Journal of Youth Development: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 1.

Conclusion

Youth in Governance programs reflect the **skills of educators** as well as the **unique needs of the communities and the youth** that they serve.

The more your participants are able to **shape the program**, the more involved they will be. Ideally, your program will evolve over time in response to youth and adult mentor feedback.

While each Youth in Governance program is unique, all programs share a common commitment to **supporting youth empowerment through civic engagement**.