

**County Youth Councils for Tomorrow's Leaders: A Toolkit for County Officials**

**Association of Arkansas Counties**

**Amie Wilcox Alexander, Clinton School of Public Service**

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## **Executive Summary**

In recent years, county officials have reported they feel that county government is underserved in the area of local civics education. Today's youth face unique and evolving challenges to their success and resilience, and at the same time, public understanding and our schools move toward national, not local, civics studies. Unfortunately, today's youth are coming of age in a time where national policy and politics overshadow the reality that the majority of transformative change happens at the local level.

To work toward a population of more civically-engaged youth, many communities have implemented programs called youth councils, which work to enhance the understanding of local government and its role for public service oriented youth. The Association of Arkansas Counties has partnered with a graduate student of the Clinton School of Public Service to develop programming that puts the tools for creating a youth council into the hands of county officials. It is our hope that a guidebook of this nature will make creating a youth council more accessible and manageable, leading to successful County Youth Councils which foster civic education, deepen the discussion of local policy issues, and develop leadership and public service values in future community leaders.

The first portion of this guidebook provides an overview of youth councils, while the second portion focuses on specific planning steps and examples of successful planning. It is our intention for this document to serve as a guide to provide interested county officials and community leaders with resources they may not have the ability or time to compile otherwise. If you have any questions about this guidebook or the process of compiling it, or have interest in creating a youth council but are not sure where to start, please feel free to contact Amie

Alexander at amie.k.alexander@gmail.com. Thank you for considering creating this transformative opportunity for your County's youth.

### **What is a youth council?**

A youth council is a medium for youth to engage in community decision-making. Youth councils take many forms – some serve an advisory role of providing input and feedback for community decision makers, while others serve more of an action and volunteer role in addressing community concerns. Youth councils may be affiliated with a local governing body, regulatory board, school, or community organization – or a combination of many. Finally, youth councils may act to implement and carry out community initiatives. Though the roles of a youth council can vary, youth councils uniformly give young people a meaningful role in the policy decision-making process.<sup>1</sup> Specific examples of these different types of youth councils are included in Appendix C.

### **Why create a youth council?**

Only 26% of young people believe that adults in the community value youth.<sup>2</sup> Today's youth face complex social pressures and forces such as fragmented families and social systems, public disengagement, and lack of access to supportive programs and services. Additionally, greater neighborhood anonymity and family mobility and the increased focus on technology and

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., McMahon, A. (2007, July). *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

<sup>2</sup> Search Institute (2011). *Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth*. <http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/a/A%26B%20Sample%20Report%202012.pdf>.

media have in effect isolated young people from community involvement. Youth are challenged in today's increasingly complex world in terms of education, future employment, and developing the social and emotional skills needed to succeed.<sup>3</sup> At least 25% of youth are at a serious risk of not achieving productive adulthood, and face risks of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Encountering these challenges can result in youth entering the labor market without adequate communication and conflict resolution skills. Research has shown that only four in ten young people are "doing well" in their early 20's, whether they are in college or working, in regards to emotional and physical health and engagement in political or community life.<sup>4</sup>

Youth are also faced with an unanticipated challenge: low expectations.<sup>5</sup> The dominant view of young people as withdrawn or disengaged affects young people's perceptions of themselves by lowering expectations about youth participation. Instead, adults should be working to raise these expectations. "Young people need stronger family and community supports. They also, however, need to be afforded the tools, training and trust to apply their

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<sup>3</sup> Eccles, J. S. & Gootman, J. A. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. <https://www.nap.edu/read/10022/chapter/12#307>.

<sup>4</sup> Gambone, M., Klem, A., & Connel, J. (2002). *Finding What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*. <http://www.ydsi.org/YDSI/pdf/WhatMatters.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Richards-Schuster, K. & Checkoway, B. (2009). *Youth Participation in Public Policy at the Local Level – New Lessons from Michigan Municipalities*. National Civic Review. Doi: 10.1002/ncr.273.

creativity and energy to effect change in their own lives and in the future of their neighborhoods, communities, cities, and states.”<sup>6</sup>

Communities can support youth against these risks and pressures in developing the next generation of community members and leaders.<sup>7</sup> Young people should know about democracy as a process in which they can and should engage, policy as a way they can and should achieve goals, and community as a vehicle for these actions.<sup>8</sup> Young people want to participate in public policy at the local level. If given opportunities, young people are capable of serving in roles on councils and agency boards, expressing positions on issues, speaking at community meetings, and even making recommendations to local officials.<sup>9</sup> Efforts to engage youth in policy can

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<sup>6</sup> Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., & McMahon, A. (2007, July). *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

<sup>7</sup> Search Institute (2011). *Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth*. <http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/a/A%26B%20Sample%20Report%202012.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Checkoway, B., Allison, T., & Montoya, M. (2005). *Youth Participation in Public Policy at the Municipal Level*. Children and Youth Services Review. Doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2005.01.001.

<sup>9</sup> Richards-Schuster, K. & Checkoway, B. (2009). *Youth Participation in Public Policy at the Local Level – New Lessons from Michigan Municipalities*. National Civic Review. Doi: 10.1002/ncr.273.

improve social development of young people by strengthening knowledge, practical skills, social values, and civil competencies.<sup>10</sup> Society benefits when youth are engaged.

“Socially engaged young people have the knowledge that their actions can effect positive change. They possess an awareness and motivation about the need for positive change in their world that is based on knowledge. They have the skills and capacity to make a contribution. They are resourceful, connected and experienced; they know how to access and navigate their ways through different settings and institutions to find and create opportunities to be engaged in purposeful collective action that can lead to positive social change or improvements in conditions for themselves and others.”<sup>11</sup>

Youth councils may promote civic engagement by:

- giving youth a role in local decision making;
- offering real-world experiences with elected and advisory bodies;
- educating youth about the role of local government;
- providing youth with an opportunity to develop leadership skills;
- increasing voice and communication between youth and adults, and among youth themselves;
- increasing youth volunteerism; and

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<sup>10</sup> Checkoway, B., Allison, T., & Montoya, M. (2005). *Youth Participation in Public Policy at the Municipal Level*. Children and Youth Services Review. Doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2005.01.001.

<sup>11</sup> Irby, M., Ferber, T., Pittman, K., with J. Tolman, & N. Yohalem. (2001). *Youth Action: Youth Contributing to Communities, Communities Supporting Youth*. Community & Youth Development Series. Volume 6. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum of Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation.

- enhancing classroom civic education.<sup>12</sup>

Youth councils allow local government to be more representative of the entire community, gain insight into younger members of the community's perspectives, encourage youth to be more active in the political process, and create sustainable leadership for the future of the community.<sup>13</sup>

### **Who creates and oversees the youth council?**

A youth council may be created and/or overseen by a variety of individuals at the discretion of the county implementing the council. Some communities delegate this authority to an individual county official or department, while others choose to work in collaboration with the local high school, 4-H chapter, or other extra-curricular student organization. While the youth council should be overseen by an individual or overarching organization which can best provide for its needs, the primary function of a youth council is to involve youth and advise local government of the youth's perspective, so this should be reflected in the person or department chosen to create and oversee the programs.

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<sup>12</sup> Florida League of Cities (2008). *A Guide for Creating a City Youth Council*.  
<http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/docs/default-source/Resources/youthcouncilguide.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.

<sup>13</sup> Florida League of Cities (2008). *A Guide for Creating a City Youth Council*.  
<http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/docs/default-source/Resources/youthcouncilguide.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.



### **Who serves on a youth council?**

The type of participants selected for the youth council is wholly dependent on the selected purpose and mission of the youth council, as well as the unique needs and network of the county. The quality of the program experience overall will greatly depend on the relationships and rapport that county leaders are able to form with participants.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is critical that if county leaders have contacts with teachers, administrators, or community programs already working in collaboration with others in the community, they have discretion in choosing the best method of participant selection.

It is crucial to recruit a diverse group of youth for participation in the council. Young people who are selected should reflect the community. Specifically, it is critical to have students of all life experiences on the council when considering issues affecting the community. To obtain a diverse pool of applicants, program planners should seek recommendations from a wide variety of community members: community-based programs, school counselors and teachers, client-based youth-serving agencies, juvenile-justice programs, faith-based organizations, and others.

For example, many programs work with students selected by recommendation from school administrators. Many of these schools have similar programs, such as a Principal's Leadership Council, or school leaders may nominate students who are involved with student government, extracurricular activities, gifted and talented, or teacher recommendation to other civic leadership programs such as Girls or Boys State or a Congressional Youth Council. Other

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<sup>14</sup> National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

programs which are not based on recommendation might provide open application periods, or require a recommendation letter from a teacher or a mentor for consideration. Please see Appendix A for questions to consider when evaluating who should serve on a youth council.

### **How do you establish a youth council?**

Researchers suggest there are two essentials for establishing a youth council: (1) a solid foundation; and (2) an unwavering belief that youth engagement in government is good for government.<sup>15</sup> After deciding to establish a youth council, the planner should outline a rough idea of what kind of council they are seeking to establish. After brainstorming a rough idea of the purpose the council will serve, the planner should begin thinking of individuals who can bring in the voice of diverse community interests.<sup>16</sup> These individuals should form an advisory board that will provide feedback and input on the content of the youth council. The structure of this relationship is highly dependent on the preferences of those involved. For example, counties might find it preferable for the council to be planned by a small working group of planners who approach the advisory board for approval and feedback. On the other hand, the advisory board might like to be more involved in the planning of the ins and outs of the council. The level of involvement and who does the majority of the planning is up to the county. For the purposes of

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<sup>15</sup> Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., McMahon, A. (2007, July). *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

<sup>16</sup> National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

this toolkit, the group of individuals who plan the youth council will be referred to as the “planning working group.”

The first step for the planning working group is to organize and outline the group’s intentions for the youth council. What is the vision for the youth council? What is its mission? What objectives and goals does the county have for this program, and how will these objectives and goals be achieved? While these questions might seem daunting, it is easiest to plan a successful program with a clear roadmap in mind. The council’s vision, mission, and goals will be general guidelines for designing the program. The objectives selected for the program will be slightly more specific, and provide a firm foundation for the customization of the council to the county’s unique needs.

Once the planning working group has a general overview of the council, it should seek feedback from the advisory committee. Together, the groups should begin to formulate these guiding concepts into the ordinances and bylaws, which will serve to legitimize the youth council. This brings transparency and legitimacy to the council as a function of county government.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the planning working group may diverge on two different tasks. One or more planners should focus on selecting topics of focus, curriculum, collaboration, and scheduling with those who will provide their expertise for the youth council. The other half of the group should focus on the adoption of bylaws, drafting and finalizing the application process,

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<sup>17</sup> Florida League of Cities (2008). *A Guide for Creating a City Youth Council*. <http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/docs/default-source/Resources/youthcouncilguide.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.

publicizing the upcoming youth council, and recruiting its future members. Specifically, it is important for notable members of the community who will be involved with the council or are involved in its planning to begin to create rapport for the council with county officials and other leaders and stakeholders who can make positive contributions to the youth council.

Various academic models exist for planning components of the youth council. The Forum for Youth Investment has utilized the Youth Mobilizer model,<sup>18</sup> which aims to achieve youth action in four phases. The first phase, foundation, focuses on creating a strong home base for participants and designing an aggressive outreach strategy for recruitment of students. Building the foundation of any program can be the most critical step – without a firm foundation, a program will be unsuccessful and unsustainable. The second phase of the program is motivation, which participants develop from a foundation which identifies core issues and conveys an intentional philosophy of purpose. The third phase focuses on building capacity. Program capacity is built by providing individual and collective support to build and sustain both youth and adult teams. The final phase, opportunity, focuses on sustaining access to and influence of the program.

In the appendices, you will find specific steps planners should take when organizing a youth council. These steps move from laying the foundation of the program into more technical planning regarding the capacity of the program and planning for program evaluation and continued sustainability.

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<sup>18</sup> Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., McMahon, A. (2007, July). *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

## What does a youth council do?

Researchers stress the balance that must be struck between engaging young people in meaningful opportunities while still understanding that they are young people with talents, opinions, and passions still forming.

“Efforts that lean too far toward individual development may run the risk of linking young people with purposeful but unimportant activities that keep them busy, but are not essential to the long-term health of their organizations or their companies. Efforts that lean too far toward community development or broad social justice, however, run the risk of exploiting or excluding young people as programs struggle to maintain their pace and focus in the drive to achieve external goals.”<sup>19</sup>

The Forum for Youth Investment notes that while most youth councils tend to focus more on the individual development side, youth councils can and should focus more on informing youth about current issues and policy options to address those options, making it more likely they will represent themselves and their peers as well as the increasing likelihood that policy makers will consider their feedback. In essence, “youth must be taken seriously by the adults who work with them, be expected to work hard, be given a real role, and have access to the policy-making process.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Irby, M., Ferber, T., Pittman, K., with J. Tolman, & N. Yohalem. (2001). *Youth Action: Youth Contributing to Communities, Communities Supporting Youth*. Community & Youth Development Series. Volume 6. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum of Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation.

<sup>20</sup> Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., McMahon, A. (2007, July). *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

Most youth councils operate on a monthly system, but this can be customized according to the county's preferences. Counties may find it best to begin a youth council program by having one or two summit-style meetings, depending on available resources. The first meeting should serve as an orientation and swearing in process for the youth council. It may also serve as a preview for the year. This may be the most opportune time to introduce students to county government basics.

At the next meeting, council members should engage in team building and creating their own bylaws. Students should additionally engage in creating their own action plans. Though the program planners should have the largest part in planning what the youth council will focus on, council members should also have a voice in the ways the program is implemented. For example, the program planner could prepare five policy issues that impact the county and that county government has authority over, and student teams may choose the issue they want to adopt. Students from this point should begin adopting assignments to complete for the next unit. The next area of focus should be on the roles of county government, including what county officials do and what county government does for the issues identified and discussed earlier. Finally, a unit of the youth summit should focus on leadership and character development.

In the Appendices, you will find additional information on curriculum structure. This information includes both pedagogical research and examples of curriculum structuring from successful youth council programs. It is important to remember that the planning working group should choose areas of focus that are the best fit for the county and its resources. You may find that some example programs focus more in one area than others – this is because it was the best fit for that particular program. Your program should be structured to suit the needs and resources of your community.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Establishing the Youth Council

#### Step 1: Basic Planning and Preliminary Roadmap of Big Picture Intentions for Youth Council

- Select Board of Advisors
- In collaboration with the Board of Advisors, appoint a working planning group to assist the program planner with the design of the Youth Council.
- Discuss, in broad terms, what the Youth Council should focus on, what its purpose is, and what the audience of the program will be. With these broad agreements, move forward with more specific planning.

#### Step 2: Formalize Guiding Concepts

##### **Determine Program Goals and Purpose**

A successful program should first establish a clear vision, mission, and goals for moving towards this vision, as well as establish objectives necessary to achieve these goals.<sup>21</sup> It will be most effective to set the vision, mission, and goals and objectives during the planning process.

- Sample Vision: X County Youth Council envisions a rising generation that is informed and engaged in creating positive policy change affecting local citizens and the world.
- Sample Mission: To educate and empower youth to seek input from affected communities, objectively research relevant needs, and work to effectively communicate

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<sup>21</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

and collaborate to make progress through dynamic solutions for issues of local government policy.

**Sample Program Goals and Purposes –**

- “The Adams County SAYL Program helps young people and government officials work together. The purpose of the program is to create a model of youth involvement within Adams County through direct participation in local government. The overall goal is to engage youth in community issues and concerns while fostering the development of confident, independent, and motivated youth leaders. Through an application process, youth are selected to serve on a County Board including one of four Adams County Board Committees where they have a voice in the decisions that affect them and their community locally.”<sup>22</sup>
- “Two youth representatives and two alternates are selected by application and appointed to one-year terms. Representatives cast advisory votes and serve on standing committees. The Washburn County Board of Supervisors welcomes youth in grades 9, 10, and 11 who are residents of Washburn County to apply to serve as youth representatives on the County Board. This initiative provides Washburn County youth an opportunity to play a valuable and active leadership role in the governance of the county while enhancing their interest in the operation of local government and civic participation.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> University of Wisconsin-Extension: Wisconsin 4-H Citizenship (2017). *Youth in Governance*. <https://fyi.uwex.edu/wi4hcitizenship/yig/>.

<sup>23</sup> University of Wisconsin-Extension: Wisconsin 4-H Citizenship (2017). *Youth in Governance*. <https://fyi.uwex.edu/wi4hcitizenship/yig/>.



### **Sample Goals and Objectives**

- Goal Statement 1: Improve competency in discussing issues facing the local community.
- Outcome Objective: Increase the percentage of participating high school students who feel comfortable discussing chosen policy issue by 50% within 6 months after program participation (as measured by pre- and post-tests).
- Goal Statement 2: Engage students in opportunities to participate in local policy development.
- Outcome Objective: Increase participants' engagement in conversations with community stakeholders by 40% in the six months following program participation.
- Outcome Objective: Increase participants' confidence when speaking about complicated policy issues with affected members of the community by 80% by the end of program completion.
- Outcome Objective: Increase participants' confidence when speaking about dynamic policy issues with elected officials by 80% by the end of program completion.

### **Step 3: Engage in Capacity Assessment**

A successful program requires planners to take a critical look at whether there are sufficient organizational capacities to successfully implement the program, and if not, determine what measures should be taken in order to enhance the capacity of available resources.<sup>24</sup> In most circumstances, a county will partner with an either internal partner or external partner in the community. Who implements the program is dependent upon the specific goals and capacity

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<sup>24</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

(timeline, budget, etc.) of the particular situation. The following are examples of potential partners.

**Potential Community Partners<sup>25</sup>**

Potential Internal Partners

<b>Who?</b>	<b>Why?</b>
County Judge’s Office	Authority, oversight of special initiatives, connections to quorum court and other governing bodies, financial resources
Planning Department	Connection to county plans, support for policy development
Recreation and Entertainment	Youth development orientation, access to youth for recruitment, facilities, opportunities for partnerships on events
Economic Development	Relates to many youth issues
Public Safety Departments	Stable infrastructure, typically has trust of local residents
Libraries	Technology and information support
Human Services, Neighborhood Services	May have youth development orientation and capacity for recruiting and training youth

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<sup>25</sup> The following examples of potential partners were modeled after examples provided by National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

## Potential External Partners

Nonprofit Agencies and Organizations	May have strong youth development orientation and capacity for recruiting and training youth
Public and Independent Schools	Access to youth for recruitment of interested faculty, civics curriculum
Colleges and Universities	May have faculty trained in youth development, expertise in data gathering strategies
Intermediary Organizations	May have strong youth development orientation and capacity for recruiting and training youth, potential resources
Faith Community and Civic/Service Clubs	May already be supporting youth in service activities
United Way, Chamber of Commerce, Other Community-Based Organizations	Potential resources, assistance with recruitment and marketing
Business/Professional Community	Potential resources
Hospitals, Community Health System	May have youth development orientation, potential resources, assistance with recruitment and marketing

#### Step 4: Select an Audience

In selecting an audience for the youth council, the program planner should consider the following questions:

- What age of youth should be considered?
- How many participants should be selected for the council?
- What sort of application process will be utilized?
- What sort of recruitment methods will be used to identify participants?

Think of these questions as applied to your county or community as you read through sample program materials. Consider them in your planning working groups and with your advisory boards. In considering these questions, know that this decision is solely in your discretion based on your county's resources and community partners and can always be changed after the first year of the program.

#### Step 5: Select Topics of Focus, Curriculum, and Schedule

##### **Overview**

- Determine Program Activities and Schedule
- What will it take for the youth council to be successful in your county? (i.e. qualities of location, organization, or governance that could give youth the best opportunities)
- Think of potential structures<sup>26</sup>
  - Designated (stand-alone department or office);

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<sup>26</sup> National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

- Embedded (county official’s office coordinates);
- Contractual (outside entity operates in a partnership model);
- Multi-jurisdictional (county-wide policy commission – youth and families commission or economic development initiative, etc. – assigns staff to support program within its area of focus).

### **Pedagogical Considerations of Youth Council Structure**

How can your county offer meaningful civic opportunities to its youth? A youth council is a system of opportunities throughout the community that connects young people to the work of local government.<sup>27</sup> The long-term goal of such a program is to maintain a continuum of opportunities available and accessible to a broad diversity of youth that allows them to impact important issues. In the beginning, this takes place through different levels of engagement.<sup>28</sup>

The first level of engagement is involvement. These activities are typically volunteer opportunities or meetings taking place with adults engaged in day-to-day operations. This should serve as the basis or beginning of the program.

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<sup>27</sup> National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> The following levels of engagement were provided by National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

The next level of engagement is consultation, in which youth have opportunities to provide input on important issues in the community. While the county maintains the authority to make final decisions, it is important that youth feel heard and valued in this stage of activities.

The next level of engagement is representation, in which youth have the opportunity to participate in ongoing county work on behalf of their peers. In achieving this stage, it may be helpful to let students have more of a voice and heightened responsibility as a voice of their peers – i.e. presenting findings from a group, speaking at a quorum court meeting, etc.

The final level of engagement is shared leadership. In this stage of engagement, youth should share positions of authority and accountability for goals and outcomes they have set. This may take the form of the completion of some “final project” or capstone-like project. The following are examples of final projects:<sup>29</sup>

- using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to plot the location of supportive organizations in the community;
- meeting with elected officials about the impacts of budget cuts on youth from low-income neighborhoods;
- creating web-based strategies for counties to reach out to youth and young adults;
- planning program content for youth geared toward financial literacy; and
- attending a school board meeting to monitor the impact of student input on board decisions.

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<sup>29</sup> Adapted from National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education & Families (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders*. <http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/authentic-youth-engagement-gid-jul10.pdf>.

## Sample Youth Council Schedule

- First Meeting – Welcome to Youth Council!
  - About the Youth Council, Q & A, Program Overview, Icebreakers and Team Formation, County Government Basics
- Second Meeting – County Government 101<sup>30</sup>
  - Curriculum Recommendation for before or after course – County Works Online<sup>31</sup>
  - Presentations and Dinner with County Officials
- Third Meeting – Leadership 101 and Project Selection
  - Leadership and Team Dynamics Training
  - Presentation of Community Issues by Officials or Affected Members
- Fourth Meeting – Working Dinner
  - Students Brainstorm within Teams about Ways to Address Issues

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<sup>30</sup> Association of Arkansas Counties. *Introduction to County Government in Arkansas*.  
<http://arconstableassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2008-Intro-to-County-Government.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> iCivics curriculum is highly recommended for County Youth Councils – in depth lesson plans are available for civics education, as well as informative educational games for youth. See iCivics (2018). *Free Curriculum Products*.  
[https://www.icivics.org/teachers?\\_ga=2.194203949.1451405432.1519832346-1142460503.1519832346](https://www.icivics.org/teachers?_ga=2.194203949.1451405432.1519832346-1142460503.1519832346);  
iCivics (2018). *Counties Work*.  
<https://www.icivics.org/games/counties-work>.

- Select Topic/Policy Issue of Project Component
  - Teams are Paired with County Employee or Official for Mentorship on Project
- Fifth Meeting – Professional Development
  - Students work through material on professionalism, networking, financial literacy, and presentation skills
  - Presentation Preparation with Teams and Mentor
- Sixth Meeting – Project Presentation and Graduation



## Step 6: Draft Bylaws Demonstrating Application Process and Recruitment of Members

### **Sample Bylaws**

- **Article I. Membership**

- **Section 1 – Representation.** A total of no more than eight (8) members will serve on the County Youth Council. The County Youth Council shall seek in its membership a diverse representation reflecting the community.<sup>32</sup>
- **Section 2 – Membership Qualifications.** All members must live within the County Limits and must be between the grades of 10 to 11.<sup>33</sup> Members shall have at least a 2.5 GPA.
- **Section 3 – Term Limits.** Terms shall be for one year. After completion of the Youth Council program, members may be eligible for recommendation to similar programs beyond the County level.
- **Section 4 – Application Process.** Members of the County Youth Council shall be chosen through an application process. Interested parties shall complete a simple application form and submit one letter of recommendation from a teacher

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<sup>32</sup> Counties should seek to establish a diverse youth council in regards to interests, experiences, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family structure, etc. When recruiting members and advertising the youth council opportunity, look to include students of all backgrounds.

<sup>33</sup> This is purely an example. Counties may find that they have a great opportunity to work with an eighth grade Civics class, while others may find that a relationship with community organizations, such as youth groups or FFA/4-H Chapters, have great opportunities for interested youth. As long as the county is recruiting members from diverse interests and engagement, this selection is in the county's discretion.

or mentor. The Advisory Board shall review the application materials and select members of the County Youth Council.

#### Step 7: Evaluation and Sustainability Planning

Project monitoring ensures that project activities are taking place as directed and are working to produce specified outcomes as program objectives provide.<sup>34</sup> Performance measurement is ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments. Performance measurement takes place by looking at a variety of indicators (input, output, efficiency, outcome, and service quality) to enable an evaluator to determine whether the program is actually achieving its purposes.

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<sup>34</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

### Sample Youth Council Performance Measurements

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Tool</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
<b>Input</b>	# of Staff Members	Count	Monthly
	# of Expert Presenters/Facilitators	Count	August
	# of direct labor hours (DLH)	Time Sheet	Monthly
	Dollars spent on Monthly Meeting	Budget	August
	<b>Output</b>	# of Student Participants at Monthly Meeting	Count
	# of Community Member Meetings	Monthly Report	Monthly
	# of Legislator Meetings	Monthly Report	Monthly
	# of Participant Hours	Monthly Report/Timesheet	Monthly
<b>Efficiency</b>	Cost per participant	Budget/Report	May
<b>Outcome</b>	# of participants interested in Local Government	Pre-test/Post-test	May
	% change in confidence discussing Policy	Pre-test/Post-test	May
	% change civic engagement	Pre-test/Post-test	May
	% change in objective research skills	Pre-test/Post-test	May
	% of participants satisfied with program	Pre-test/Post-test	May
<b>Service Quality</b>	% of stakeholders satisfied with program	Stakeholder Feedback	September & May

These project monitoring metrics will be used to evaluate the program. In most cases, it is most effective to collect final data and analyze the effectiveness of the program yearly. The program evaluator will need to conduct two types of evaluation: process evaluation and outcome evaluation. Evaluation of the youth council should take place in order to improve the program after the pilot year and to gain new insights into effective practices for improvement of the program. Additionally, small-scale evaluation may take place after monthly meetings based on participant and instructor feedback.

Process evaluation assesses what activities were implemented, the quality of the implementation, and any strengths and weaknesses of the implementation.<sup>35</sup> Process evaluation is necessary for short-term and long-term improvement. The following questions are examples of questions an evaluator might ask in order to analyze how well the project functioned.

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<sup>35</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

<b>Process Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Process Evaluation Tool/Method</b>	<b>Schedule of Completion</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
Did the program follow the plan for delivery?	Implementation Plan	Quarterly	Project Director
What is the participants' satisfaction?	Outcome Survey Focus Groups	April	Evaluator
Did participants have necessary resources for work?	Monthly Communication Outcome Survey	Monthly April	Project Director
What is the staff's perception of the program?	Program Debriefing Focus Groups	September April	Project Assistant
What were the estimated number of community meetings in comparison with the actual number of community meetings?	Implementation Tool Monthly Reports	Quarterly	Project Director
Were activities completed before or on deadlines?	Monthly Reports	Quarterly	Evaluator

Outcome evaluation analyzes the extent to which the program has achieved its objectives.<sup>36</sup> Outcome evaluation is important because it provides evidence that your program is accomplishing its goals. One simple way to conduct an outcome evaluation is by using a before and after measurement. For example, participants in the youth council will be given the

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<sup>36</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

evaluation instrument before participation in the first session of the council in August, and will be given the evaluation again after program completion in March.

Evaluations should gauge students' progress in areas identified by the goal and objectives of the program. For example, the evaluations may focus on the participant's knowledge gains in the areas of civic literacy, levels of understanding of policy complexity, objective research tools, skills, and frequency, the communication of complex ideas, awareness and assessment of the complex needs of rural communities, and participants' comfort level in discussing this knowledge with community members, stakeholders, and legislators.

### **Program Sustainability**

Evaluation of the program's effectiveness in achieving its goals and objectives will assist the program county in achieving project sustainability. Project sustainability is the continuation of a program after initial funding has ended.<sup>37</sup> Sustainability of programs that should continue is critical because the ending of a program that obtains positive results is not productive when a problem the program was targeting continues to exist. Successful programs that are not continued can also create resistance in local communities toward other similar programs in the future.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

<sup>38</sup> Shediak-Rizkallah, M. C. & Bone, L. R. (1998). *Planning for Sustainability of Community-based Health Programs: Conceptual Frameworks and Future Directions for Research, Practice, and Policy*. *Health Education Research*, 13(1), 87-108.

When assessing the sustainability of a youth council, it is necessary to consider organizational factors, social factors, and political factors.<sup>39</sup> When considering organizational factors, the program administrator should consider current capacity and workload factors in the partner organization which has been chosen for the youth council, whether internal or external. Community and participant buy-in is also crucial to the program. Being able to cultivate a non-partisan atmosphere is important to this; students must feel as comfortable and competent in their ability to discuss policy issues as possible. For students to be able to discuss sensitive and divisive issues with community members, this environment is possibly the most important aspect of this program. Additionally, it is necessary to form positive relationships with stakeholders and community leaders that participate in the program, both to utilize these leaders for their feedback and encourage their continuance with the program. Finally, in terms of potential political factors, it is necessary to keep the youth council as non-political as possible. In order to secure and maintain funding, sponsors may feel political pressure from their own stakeholders if the program becomes political. Because the majority of the funding for this program will come from government-authorized activity budgets, it will be important to protect your partner organization and its own future funding. Additionally, it will be necessary to be mindful of the perspectives of speakers, presenters, and staff members when working with students throughout this program.

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<sup>39</sup> Chinman, M., Imm, P., & Wandersonman, A. (2004). *Getting to Outcomes: Promoting Accountability through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

## Appendix B: Program Examples

### National Programs

- Fairfax County Youth Leadership Program<sup>40</sup>
  - Mission: “to increase and enhance positive public awareness, participation in local government, and exploration of careers in public service.”
  - Goal: “help high school students gain an understanding and appreciation of how local government impacts their everyday lives.”
  - Curriculum and activities are focused on developing citizenship skills and encouraging participants to become active, involved citizens.
  - Holds monthly sessions in which students participate in seminars, workshops, and presentations by county staff.
  - Sessions consist of interactive lessons and debates, cooperative learning experiences, and visits to county facilities.
    - Areas of Focus –
      - Introduction to Fairfax County and Getting to Know the Youth Leadership Program Class
      - Education and Human Services
      - Human Services – Poverty Simulation
      - The Budget: Expression of Community Priorities
      - Cultural and Recreational Programs
      - The Judicial System and Public Safety

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<sup>40</sup> Fairfax County Virginia (2017). *Youth Leadership Program*.  
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/youth-leadership-program.htm>.



- Land Use Policy and Environmental Services
  - Between monthly seminars, students complete a task based on the previous month's meeting.
  - During the summer of the program, students participate in paid internship program in county agency.
  - Near the end of the program, students serve as program ambassadors and present their experiences to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade civics class.
- Hendrix County<sup>41</sup>
  - Mission: “to develop leadership potential, foster civil awareness, and promote responsible volunteerism among county youth.”
  - Youth council is made up of five students, who meet once a month from August until March
  - The following topics are covered: business, agriculture, and public safety; health and human services; leadership skills; county and local government; and state government.
  - Additional program focus: building relationships between students, communication skills, and presentation skills.

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<sup>41</sup> Leadership Hendricks County, Inc. (2017). *Our Youth Program*.  
<http://www.leadershiphendrickscounty.org/about-us/youth-programs>.

- Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service – Youth in Governance<sup>42</sup>
  - Focus: creating a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision making and governance, and encouraging youth community service and civic involvement.
  - Cooperative Extension works with county boards and city councils to include youth representation in government, including but not limited to youth with committee voting rights, youth advisors on county board committees, and youth representatives at full board meetings.
  - Program also focuses on opportunities for youth to learn about and interact with local government by participating in community action projects and meeting with local stakeholders to represent the program.
  - Youth serve on a specific community leadership board focused on youth philanthropy, education, health, and other initiatives.

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<sup>42</sup> University of Wisconsin-Extension: Wisconsin 4-H Citizenship (2017). *Youth in Governance*. <https://fyi.uwex.edu/wi4hcitizenship/yig/>.

## Arkansas Programs

- Springdale Youth Council<sup>43</sup>
  - Mission: “to encourage young people to become engaged with their local government, receive mentoring from City officials, perform community service for the benefit of Springdale residents, advise local government officials on the issues that face young people in the community, and learn about local government and the importance of civic engagement.”
  - Council members participate in group events, group service projects, job shadowing, a group presentation, and individual mentorship with City Council Members and the Mayor.
  - Topics of focus in the program are city government, political participation, economic development, public safety, education and recreation, and a mock city council event.
- Little Rock Mayor’s Youth Council<sup>44</sup>
  - Focus: students volunteer at events and non-profits in Little Rock; volunteer hours can be used for school and club requirements. The Mayor’s Youth Council contributes more than 500 hours of volunteer service to the city per year. Past classes of the council have also focused on making Little Rock more

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<sup>43</sup> City of Springdale (2017). *Youth Council Program Guide*.  
<http://www.springdalear.gov/732/Program-Guide>.

<sup>44</sup> City of Little Rock (2018). *Little Rock Mayor’s Youth Council 2017 – 2018*.  
<https://www.littlerock.gov/city-administration/mayors-office/little-rock-mayor-s-youth-council/>;  
<https://www.littlerock.gov/city-administration/mayors-office/mayors-commissions-task-forces/>.

environmentally sustainable, and learned about Little Rock's departments and responsibilities.

- Main Events: Little Rock Marathon, the Race for the Cure, Wildwood Harvest Festival, the Main Street Food Truck Festival, the Arkansas Cornbread Festival, and the Just Communities of Arkansas Walk for CommUNITY.
- Audience: grades 10-12 that live in Little Rock
- Open Meetings: Mayor's Youth Council meets from 2-3 PM on one Saturday each month in the City Hall Board Room at 500 W Markham Street.
- Participation: Web Page Sign-Up for Information; Application Forms are added in August of each year when registration opens.
- Additional Opportunity: A small number of the students in the Mayor's Youth Council have the opportunity to participate in a six-month Youth Leadership Program, focused on developing a student's understanding of their community and building youth leadership capacity. Sessions focus on team-building, politics and government, economic development, homelessness, public safety, and the arts. Students travel to one of Little Rock's international sister cities at the conclusion of the program to gain international experience.

- North Little Rock Mayor’s Youth Council<sup>45</sup>
  - Mission Statement: “The Mayor’s Youth Council is a community based youth organization that is North Little Rock’s response to meeting the goals of our youth as set out by America’s Promise. To that end, opportunities will be provided for our youth to grow and learn through serving their community while volunteering in the metropolitan area’s non-profit agencies.”
  - Focus: The North Little Rock Mayor’s Youth Council is organized with America’s Promise Alliance<sup>46</sup> tenants at the center of its organization:
    - To mentor – to provide an ongoing relationship with a caring adult;
    - To protect – to provide safe places and structured activities during non-school hours;
    - To nurture – to be sure that they have a healthy start;
    - To teach – to give them marketable skills through effective education; and
    - To serve – to provide opportunities to give back through community service.
  - Cooperating Non-Profit Organizations: Boys and Girls Clubs, the Arkansas Rice Depot, the Salvation Army, the American Cancer Society, Meals on Wheels, the Children’s Museum of Arkansas, the Museum of Discovery, The City of North

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<sup>45</sup> City of North Little Rock (2018). *Mayor’s Youth Council*. [http://nlr.ar.gov/government/a\\_z\\_department\\_list/mayor\\_s\\_youth\\_council](http://nlr.ar.gov/government/a_z_department_list/mayor_s_youth_council).

<sup>46</sup> America’s Promise Alliance (2018). *Our History*. <http://www.americaspromise.org/our-history>.

Little Rock, Laman Library, Families are Special Adoption Agency, Arkansas Cares, and Our House Homeless Shelter.

- Scholarship Funds: Last year, 27 members earned over 100 hours and qualified for The Presidential Award. Six of these seniors therefore qualified for a \$1,500 scholarship.
- Benton Mayor's Youth Council<sup>47</sup>
  - Mission Statement:
    - “We the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council are honorable, trustworthy, ambassadors representing the City of Benton in an enthusiastic and respectful way. We are the role models who volunteer with upbeat attitudes and who have a drive to serve the common good of the community. We are leaders who eagerly involved ourselves in community activities, always striving to make Benton a more beautiful place. We are a voice for the youths of this city, upholding the opinions of our peers. We are the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council!”
  - Focus: Connecting students to the community's needs.
  - Application: students must answer questions regarding current obligations, interests and activities, issues important to them in the community, why they want to serve, personal skills and characteristics, and volunteer experience. Students must also include both a school and community reference. The outgoing Seniors

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<sup>47</sup> City of Benton (2018). *Mayor's Youth Advisory Council*.

<https://www.bentonar.org/mayors-youth-advisory-council>.

of the council interview applicants with the program director. No more than 45 students are selected each year.

- Meetings: twice per month for one hour, plus one project at 4-6 hours per year.
- Students are expected to contribute 40 hours of service per school year.
- Leadership Hot Springs<sup>48</sup>
  - Part of Leadership Hot Springs, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1987.
  - Involves students from seven different school districts in Garland County, Arkansas. Typically has over 50 applicants, selects around 35 students in grades 10-12.
  - Program runs from September to May, with meetings on the first Tuesday of each month.
  - Program focuses on leadership programming and community civic knowledge. One focus of the program is on City and County Government, including ordinances, bodies, court systems, etc. The County Judge speaks, and students talk with the Quorum Court about budgeting issues. Program includes Law Enforcement Day when students tour the jail system and learn more about government budgeting. On Health and Human Services Day, students learn about community issues, and work with groups such as Habitat for Humanity.
  - Material is presented by the program administrator to the leadership curriculum committee two months before the date of the session. The committee receives a

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<sup>48</sup> Personal Interview with Glenda Dunn, January 31, 2018.

preliminary agenda, with a final agenda the month before with any recommended changes implemented.

- Alumni of the program may serve on the selection committees, may go through the adult program, and may even go through the selection committee that selects the organization's board.
- Student evaluations are performed at each session.