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## Youth Involvement and Leadership in Youth Councils

Youth Councils throughout California have identified youth involvement and youth leadership in Youth Councils as a high priority and have expressed an immediate need for strategies and tips. The following examples highlight strategies used by Youth Councils for engaging and retaining youth, providing youth leadership opportunities, and processes that encourage the youth voice in building a comprehensive youth-serving system.

### The Voice of Youth

- Conduct multiple area town hall meetings targeted to youth to collect their ideas and perceptions about the effectiveness of services they receive. Be sure to advertise well!
- Survey youth to gather input about the use, quality, effectiveness, access and reach of programs.
- Capitalize on youth surveys already conducted by community organizations such as Juvenile Justice and alternative high schools in capturing the voice of your youth.
- Hold Town Hall Meetings specifically for youth.
- Conduct a *Youth Interest Survey* to reach an understanding of prioritized services most in demand. Require non-WIA applicants to fill out the survey when applying for services.
- Ask the youth, "What do you need, want, use?" Youth will identify the gaps in services that Council members are likely to miss. Follow-up with action.
- Follow-up the surveys and special youth meetings with an assessment report that analyses collected data.
- Conduct multiple focus groups for youth around your county that provide opportunities to discuss effectiveness of current services and how their delivery could be improved.
- Engage youth in crafting a *Youth Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire* draft. Introduce the draft to youth in focus sessions to comment on content, relevance, and language.
- Ask youth to approach business 'champions', who have become disengaged and urge them to ask another colleague to become involved.
- Each one-stop community creates a focus group with WIA-enrolled youth as members.
- Arrange for youth to signal to staff if, during a meeting, they feel their voice is not acknowledged.



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## Youth Committees and Subgroups

- Rely on the input and expertise of area enrolled youth through subcommittees specifically focused on important issues.
- Assign Council members to mentor youth members.
- Assign difficult issues to tackle to youth subcommittees, such as improving one-stop activities, customer service, duplication of services in schools, policy issues, and planning events.
- Create a focus group of youth involved in WIA youth work experience to meet and discuss issues. Representatives from the group attend the Youth Council.
- Hold Council meetings on high school campuses when the agenda is on issues that apply to youth, to encourage the Council to remain focused on its goal of creating one system for all young people.
- Alternate youth subcommittee meeting times and locations to encourage broad participation.
- Require service providers to convene a council of youth advisors. Have youth present their perceptions to the Youth Council.

## Preparing and Utilizing Youth

- Review the Council minutes, remove the adult bias, and send the minutes out to students and schools, increasing awareness and understanding of the Council.
- Give youth members the same full training as is provided to the Youth Council, including education on Robert's Rules of Order.
- Use youth to reach homeless young people. With adequate adult support, locate where these youth 'hang out' during the day, survey them, and encourage them to access services.
- Use youth as facilitators at conferences, institutes and planning sessions.
- Train enrolled youth to act as spokespersons for your Youth Council. Arrange for youth leaders to speak directly to hospitals, PTA's, businesses, youth service organizations, government officials, and schools.
- Seek non-traditional youth leaders and develop their skills.
- Recommend that service providers build youth leadership development opportunities into their proposals to deliver/offer services.
- Construct a web page or video just for youth, created by youth!
- Arrange for youth training that enables them to sometimes take the lead on projects and management of the Youth Council.
- During summer programs, include advanced leadership skills training and experiences such as violence prevention, outreach to potential gang members, and website creation.
- Mobilize youth leadership to enhance and directly market those services that youth have voiced that they need the most.



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## Youth Work Experience with the Council

- Arrange for WIA-enrolled youth to get credit that applies toward graduation and a stipend for their participation in the Youth Council.
- Create paid work experience positions for youth. Dedicate a portion of their hours (possibly paid via WIA) to work with the Council, at the one-stop, or as school liaisons.
- Engage WIA-enrolled youth to produce summer programs, train as peer councilors and create activities for other participants.
- Youth counselors can develop leadership skills while training and mentoring younger students in summer school programs.
- Augment funding to expand work experience, occupational training, and leadership. Require that a significant percentage of Council funds must be used in those areas via service providers.
- Encourage service providers to hire enrolled youth to perform services.
- Hire enrolled youth to:
  - conduct outreach of recruitment, intake, assessment,
  - test reading and math grade levels
  - conduct workshops on "How to Get and Retain a Job."
  - work on mapping of services, champions, and resources.

## Engaging and Retaining Youth

- Determine how to use the information collected from youth surveys and input activities. Youth need to know that their ideas and concerns warrant responses.
- Provide youth with a special 30-minute briefing or learning session prior to Council meetings.
- Provide youth members with a 'cheat sheet' explaining the agenda and language so that they feel confident in fully participating.
- Learn to recognize where it is important to get input from youth, and where it is not, so the work does not become tedious for youth.
- Understand youth talents and create situations where they are fully mined, valued and showcased, maximizing their potential and impact.
- Conduct Council business in front of youth, requiring adults to make their explanations clear.
- Engage adult members of the Youth Council to actively mentor youth on subcommittees or task groups.
- Once youth become interested and active, they want to have a voice in the decision-making process. Create ways for them to be heard and productive.
- Arrange for youth members to visit Youth Council programs to get their feedback for the oversight and evaluation process.
- Use youth members as a litmus test. If Council meetings are boring, too complex, or discouraging for the youth they probably are for the adults as well.



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- Arrange for youth to signal to staff if, during a meeting, they feel their voice is not acknowledged.
  - Place computers in agencies and schools so that students can access service information. Sort the information by the ten WIA elements.
  - Create communication channels to get Council information, programs and opportunities to all students, schools and parents.
  - Contract for the development of a web-posted geographical map of services.