

Working Side by Side with Youth

Keys to Success

- Welcome the young people to the group or committee. Introduce the members to one another.
- Affirm the young people for their participation.
- Provide positive, honest feedback on ideas and insights. Not every idea a young person (or adult) contributes will be great or on target.
- Give the youth responsibility early and expect achievement. Let the youth learn from their mistakes, too.
- Recognize the gaps between the information, knowledge, and life experiences of youth and adults. Young people (and adults) need help, at times, filling those gaps.
- Invite the active participation of the young people by creating space and time for them to share their ideas.
- Share information about the way the group or committee operates. The young people will likely be nervous about participating if they perceive there are unwritten rules that need to be followed.
- Whenever possible, invite two or more young people to participate on an adult committee. One young person alone can be lost or isolated.
- Get parental support for youth involvement. Share with the parents information about the young people's role, the group, and the time commitment. Address any concerns the parents have. For instance, if schoolwork is suffering from overinvolvement, provide a break from participation in your group.
- Address issues related to age differences. For example: Will you all go by first names? Will the adults refrain from drinking alcohol at a social event or smoking cigarettes when youth are present?
- Be careful of stereotyping youth by age, appearance or clothing style, gender, ethnicity, or economic class.

What You Might Want to Know About Youth

- Young people often have less patience for the way something has always been done. They are likely to ask questions about traditions and to be interested in trying new ideas.
- Most young people have shorter attention spans and are comfortable with multitasking and working at a fast pace.
- Young people have different learning styles, so you may need to augment written and verbal communication with visual aids, add more experiential meeting elements, and break into small groups for discussions.
- Not all youth carry calendars with them. They may need a reminder phone call or e-mail a day or two before each meeting.
- Young people might have less formal knowledge but be more able than adults to name their lived experiences.
- Young people recognize when they are being patronized, and they resent being looked down upon. However, they appreciate efforts that help them share their experience or insight, as well as learn from other people's wisdom.
- Once they have formed relationships, young people have no problem participating fully. Previous generations were more conscious of the role of the elders than is this generation.
- Youth often come to evening meetings straight from after-school activities, sports practice, or work. Consider serving snacks at meetings to accommodate missed meals (and growing bodies).

Planning for Success

- How will you welcome the young people into your group? How will introductions be done?
- Is there background information the young people should have before the first gathering?
- Who will mentor the young people—provide knowledge, background information, and feedback and make reminder phone calls?
- What changes might you need to make to your meetings or gatherings to involve the young people more fully?

Some Things to Think About

- Are you willing to do things differently if the young people make suggestions that would invite change or if a modification would help a young person participate more fully?
- Are the meetings or gatherings life-giving for the adults who participate? If not, what should be changed before bringing in youth that would give everyone a better experience?