

Involving Young People in Organizational Decision Making

Explore why you want to involve young people.

Check your motivation. There's no wrong reason to involve youth. You may want young people to have leadership opportunities, or your organization may perceive youth as true partners in decision making.

Make an organizational commitment.

An organization's leaders and staff must be committed to involving young people. They may be asked to commit extra time to trainings, explain rudimentary meeting processes, or even provide transportation to meetings.

Have an inclusive process.

Extend the opportunity for governance to youth from a range of backgrounds, even those you might not expect to be interested. You want a young person who possesses skills, a unique perspective, and a readiness for your governance environment. The most obvious young person, someone who has a long involvement with the organization, may or may not be best for your governing body.

Provide a thorough and youth friendly orientation and training.

It is important to orient any new leaders to your organization's structure and policies, especially so with young people who might be new to professional environments. Orientation also gives you a chance to find out more about your new leader, so you can thoughtfully involve her or him.

Build intergenerational relationships.

At least one meeting per year should be committed to youth/adult team building. Intergenerational groups are always more successful when members have explored their own thoughts and attitudes about age.

Solidify young people's involvement.

This means amending bylaws and policies to state that young people are permanently included in decision making and leadership in your organization. Young people should be promptly replaced by other young people when their service has ended. This ensures that youth involvement is not just a phase of your current administration.

Involving Young People in Organizational Decision Making (cont.)

Make your meetings fun and interactive.

Activities like “go arounds” and “brainstorms” ensure that everyone has a voice in the decision making process. They create a dynamic environment that will engage all of your members and are critical to involving youth.

Mentor younger leaders.

For youth to be full and active participants, they need time to prepare for meetings and to evaluate and discuss them afterwards. Adult leaders or staff members should meet with young people for a few minutes before meetings and after meetings.

Involve young people in visible leadership positions.

Committee positions and other visible leadership roles should include young people as frequently as possible. Involving youth deeply in governance fosters their fullest participation and ensures that they are included in important between meeting business.

Build affinity between young leaders with their peers.

Set up systems and situations for young people to network. If there are other local young people in leadership positions bring them together on occasion to discuss their work, learn new skills, and support one another. This kind of networking re-energizes youth from your organization and introduces them to the larger youth governance movement.

Build affinity among adult allies who support young leaders.

If there are other organizations with young people in leadership positions in your area, gather together executive directors and adult board members to discuss their successes and struggles with involving youth.