

Tips for Assisting Youth on Workgroups with Adults

Prior to the Meeting:

- If you are seeking representation for your workgroup and have certain qualifications, make these known in advance so youth selected can best contribute.
- Youth attendees should understand the purpose of the group and what is to be gained from it. Youth attendees should have an understanding of how they will participate in the group and what their role is. The coordinator of the group should provide any written documents to youth such as bylaws prior to the meeting. The coordinator should contact the youth prior to the meeting to introduce themselves, explain the group, what is expected from them as a participant and answer any questions the youth may have.
- Ensure that meeting information – all invites and communication – is sent directly to the youth as well as their Chafee or TL provider.
- Provide the agenda in advance so youth can familiarize themselves on topics to be discussed. If you are aware of specific topics in which you would want input during the meeting in advance, provide this information to the youth so they can prepare responses.
- Share with youth who will comprise the meeting membership and what they can expect in terms of meeting structure.
- Share with youth what the formality level is including attire expectations. Indicate whether jeans are acceptable, business casual, or Sunday best, with the understanding they would not need to purchase new clothes in order to participate.
- Share with youth locations logistics such as parking, especially if they are driving themselves to the meeting.
- Ensure youth and chaperone are included in any meal counts.
- Ensure transportation has been arranged for the youth to attend meeting.
- The coordinator should visit with youth before the meeting starts to put them at ease. It can be intimidating to be the youngest person in the room, and sometimes reviewing the agenda and affirming the value of their participation helps.
- If the meeting is in person, it is a good idea to bring paper and pen for the youth so the youth can take notes or write down questions they may have in case they do not bring this on their own.
- Determine if a chaperone will need to be present for direct coaching the youth on how to present in a leadership role. If a chaperone is not present, determine who in the group will coach the youth. Assign a mentor to the youth from the group who will help support the youth's involvement.
- Youth members are not professionals, but can be valuable members of the group. Ensure group members understand what the youth will bring as a participant and team member. Let them know as the coordinator how much you want the youth's input included.
- Even with coaching, some youth may tend to only speak about their personal experiences with limited objectiveness. It's important for members of the group to have an understanding and be understanding. Sometimes the first meetings can be stressful for a youth – they may be uncomfortable talking, not sure of how much to share or when to insert their statements.

During the Meeting:

- Ensure the youth is comfortable and welcomed.
- Ensure introductions are made if it is a formed group, not just of the youth but of other members. If possible to incorporate an icebreaker that the youth can relate to. Let youth share achievements and why they were selected to be on the workgroup.
- Ensure youth understands ground rules of meeting, logistics of restrooms and other housekeeping issues. Let youth know they can step out as needed for a break.
- Ensure youth have an understanding of confidentiality and what is being shared by the youth in the group and how it will be used.
- Youth who sit quietly during meetings most likely have something to say, but don't feel safe saying it. Establishing safety in the group is also incredibly important.

- Try to avoid using acronyms. If you notice this occurring, take a moment to explain the acronym to the youth as they may feel intimidated and not ask.
- Try to introduce a new topic with a quick summary of where you are to-date so youth can have a better understanding of what has happened and what you are getting ready to talk about to aid in their participation.

After the Meeting:

- Debrief with the youth on how things went. If there is an issue with something that youth states during the meeting, coach the youth immediately after the event.
- Ensure that invoice payment paperwork is correctly completed and submitted to OY PDS for processing. We have told the youth that they will receive this and it is a small token we are able to provide in appreciation of the youth's participation. Youth may have had to miss work to attend and for some youth, finances are tight so every bit helps.
- If a youth drives themselves to the meeting, mileage should be included on the invoice payment paperwork by including the starting and ending address. OY PDS will figure the total – you do not need to complete the total amount to be reimbursed but need to include the starting and ending addresses.
- Communicate in between meetings to keep youth engaged and check in on progress of tasks being completed.

Coaching Tips:

- Youth need honest feedback as this is a learning experience and an opportunity to develop their leadership skills but keep in mind when coaching to be friendly and supportive in feedback given especially when first establishing a relationship.
- Ask youth direct questions when asking for input to the group (not just "tell me what you think...")
- Remind youth of the importance of staying on the subject at hand gently but firmly. (Have a hand signal or head nod for them to watch for if they get off subject so they can redirect themselves.)
- Advise youth that things rarely get accomplished when the subject is mostly negative. Acknowledge their negative experiences and then start asking them "How can we begin to fix this today?" type of questions.
- All conversations should be aimed at meeting a common ground. If they feel this is not happening during a discussion, encourage the youth to refrain from providing input until there is an avenue in the conversation to do so.
- Come to an understanding with the youth that during the meeting, you are now equals and are now a support for each other. Acknowledge that you may be a bit nervous also, but continue to show confidence.
- If you see the youth getting overwhelmed, take the lead on the topic and give the youth a few minutes to decompress until they feel more comfortable.
- Keep in mind that youth are representing the interests of their peers but cannot speak for all youth. As a leader/facilitator, model avoiding putting them on the spot in this way.
- Set aside a specific amount of time in a meeting for youth input/discussion if needed. There will be some youth who have a learning style in which they would not want to be put on the spot. Some youth may initially be more comfortable if they can write their thoughts down and get "approval" before sharing out loud – so they get a feel for what is appropriate to share or what can wait. This will come with experience but initially be as accommodating as possible to the youth's needs.
- Tell youth they need to limit their responses to 3 clear points if needed (if they have more, direct the youth to write it down to share after others have had a chance)
- Reassure youth that their input is wanted and let them see how they contribute. Validating responses from youth, even if they don't quite fit or seem a little off, is also important as it helps the youth feel heard. Youth may not have been listened to or had an opportunity to speak in the past so may see this as an opportunity or may believe they are really going to be heard or taken seriously, or that they have anything to contribute. Get youth excited about what they can change or what they can do as part of the group.