



Building an Effective Youth Advisory Board

Youth Council: San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement

The Challenge: The San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council was concerned with its level of youth involvement; youth attendance was poor and their input limited.

The Practice and the Evidence: Inspired by information from YCi about the value of Youth Advisory Boards, the San Diego Workforce Partnership (staff to the Youth Council) decided to increase youth engagement by establishing one as an offshoot of its Youth Council. Of the seven youth members who joined the Youth Advisory Board when it began in June 2003, six remain active members and one new youth has joined. The group meets at 4PM on the last Monday of each month at the Workforce Partnership offices. Rotating slots enable each youth member to attend one of the bi-monthly Youth Council meetings. Most discussion is about matters on which the Youth Council is seeking youth input, but youth also contribute agenda items. When youth member Michelle Watson proposed scheduling Youth Council meetings at a time more convenient for youth members, the Council readily agreed. Program Specialist Mark Nanzer sees this as just one example of effective youth-adult interactions that have come out of the Youth Advisory Board. “The program is not without its challenges, but successes outweigh them,” he observes. After a year in operation, the Youth Advisory Board is busy determining the status of present members, recruiting new ones, and getting word out to providers who are interested in forming their own Youth Advisory Boards.

The Details: Nanzer and Dan Radojevic of the San Pasqual Academy Youth Employment Services started the recruitment process by building on relationships with existing WIA-funded providers. Dan was the link to Michelle, a former foster youth who was eager to participate, having seen too many organizations with “youth” in the name but little authentic youth involvement. Intern Jason Adame created fliers, recruitment materials, and applications, which were sent in an email blast to providers, who were asked to pass along information and recommend candidates. “Those staff members were a tremendous help,” Nanzer recalls. “They helped the youth feel supported by their local organizations and transported them to our original meetings. And we did a lot of follow-up phone calls.”

Sixteen youth showed up at the original meeting in May 2003. “We understood we were all there to make a difference, and we couldn’t get anyone to be quiet,” Watson recalled. The group brainstormed about the structure of the subcommittee and its role relative to the Youth Council,

(continued)



then established membership and recruitment procedures. Six of the seven original members remain active, in part because of support provided by the San Diego staff. Before each Youth Council meeting, Nanzer sits down with the youth delegated to attend it and reviews the terms, the agenda, and the protocol in detail. “We committed to doing that because we feel it’s so important for them to be knowledgeable about what they’re voting on - funding recommendations, programmatic implementations,” he explains. “We learned early on that when it’s time to vote, we don’t want youth turning around and looking to us for direction.” Staff also provide transportation to meetings.

Subcommittee processes are constantly being reviewed and revisited. For example, at the first Youth Council retreat, potential mentors put their contact information on cards and youth were expected to make follow-up calls. Youth found this intimidating, and staff realized that face-to-face socializing would be more effective in building relationships, so the Youth Advisory Board is considering another retreat. Other lessons learned include the following ideas:

- Select representative youth, not valedictorians, but those who are struggling. “They’re harder to serve and harder to transport, but they’re the ones who receive the services, and they should have a say on whether services are appropriate or not. They become ringleaders,” says Nanzer. Watson confirms that “as a leader, I pulled other youth to a more positive self-image, to where they believed that positive change is possible,”
- Administrative follow-up is essential. “If you have a lead, if you get a phone call, follow it up; call, visit, bring a youth to share his experiences. Until youth actually go through the process, it’s hard to engage them,” Nanzer advises. The challenge in San Diego is all the greater because no funds are available with which to pay youth participants.

Breakthrough Moment: Youth member Watson set a precedent by sitting on a four-member panel that evaluated the yearlong youth program’s RFP. She read five different proposals, scored them, discussed her opinions with the other members, and voted. This kind of collaboration and cooperation has given youth genuine voice on substantive issues like funding recommendations and program design that have historically been voted on only by adults.

What’s Next for this YCidea? After the Youth Advisory Board is functioning smoothly, San Diego staff plans to follow up with partners who expressed interest in creating Youth Advisory Boards of their own. The San Diego subcommittee would be bumped up to a Youth Advisory Board Council (though remaining a subsidiary of the Youth Council).

Still in the brainstorming stage, the idea is to create a network of WIA-funded, program-specific Youth Advisory Boards. Two members from each YAB would rotate onto to the YAB Council, providing input on items beyond standard funding and programming matters. “We want a mixture of youth from all over because I know how important good youth representation is, and I want youth to succeed,” Watson declares. If successful, the San Diego program will provide a model of youth involvement for other social service programs that are helping youth.

(continued)



Where to Go for More Information

San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council

Kelly Henwood
San Diego Workforce Partnership
Director of Youth Programs
(619) 228-2900
kellyh@workforce.org

Tools

Click the following links to access the San Diego Youth Advisory Council's supportive tools and documents.

[Youth Advisory Board application](#)

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_application.doc)

[Youth Advisory Board flier](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABflyer.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board interview questions](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABInterviewQuestionsGroup.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board recommendations](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABrecommendation.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board update](#) (March, 04) to inform Youth Council of youth members' activities

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_update_03-04.doc)

[Youth Advisory Board presentation](#) at CWA conference

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_CWA_presentation3.ppt)

[Youth Advisory Board members Role/Responsibility/Authority document](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/draftroleresponsauth.doc>)