



Highlights from a Conference Call on Engaging Youth-Strategies and Ideas for Involving Youth on your Youth Council

Increasingly YCi and local Youth Councils recognize it is crucial for youth to be involved on the Councils. YCi is providing different opportunities for youth and adults to address the issue. Recently YCi organized several opportunities for youth to explain what helps them to be connected and what discourages them from getting connected. Two of these sessions were held, for example, during the All Youth – One System conference in late February: the Youth perspectives Session and the Closing Plenary.

To read notes from these sessions, please go to:

http://www.nww.org/yCi/wsreporterdocs/YCiYouthOrientationMeetingNotes01_25_05.pdf

On March 8, New Ways to Work and YCi held a content call regarding Engaging Youth on Youth Councils. The call was designed for adults who attended the All Youth - One System Conference in late February, and it was structured to be a peer learning experience. Eldonna Caudill of the **Tulare County WIB** and Marco Lucero of **Anaheim WIB Youth Council** began the call by sharing their Council's strategies for engaging youth. Participants then discussed ideas for helping youth manage their time, using mentoring, and setting up nomination and application procedures

Tulare County Work Groups Solve Initial Problems

Eldonna Caudill explained that they did not have a lot of success engaging youth on their Council initially, four and a half years ago. The few young people who came "seemed very bewildered" and even though the adult members took time to help them, they stopped coming because they had other commitments. Caudill also reported that they got feedback "that the meetings were kind of boring. Part of it was [the youth didn't know] the background or importance [of the issues]. So it wasn't an entirely successful experience for them or for us."

They soon changed strategies. "Very early on we started recruiting young people to sit on work groups, groups focused on events and issues that were interesting to youth. "We found that we were getting a lot more youth involved. That's been very successful."

A prime example Caudill gave was a planning committee for a conference. "[The youth on the work group] contributed greatly to the success of the conference. We had to mentor a little. [However, the youth] contacted speakers and helped put it on. It was youth driven."



Caudill found that the Youth Council members were able to engage youth on other projects as well, including construction of a "youth-focused web site. We brought youth into design the entire site. They [got help from] our tech people, but they did all the graphics and content."

Current projects include a workplace ethics training group that will be run by youth, and another youth-driven conference scheduled for the fall.

Caudill noted that they also actively seek out youth input. "We do youth focus groups. [We ask them] what kinds of things work for them, what gets in the way, and how they get connected to services they need out in the world." Caudill has been gratified to learn that youth want to take on leadership roles. "The youth told us they wanted more opportunities to engage in leadership and decision making models," Caudill told the conference call participants.

Caudill pointed out that with their work group approach, they have been able to "engage far more youth than [we would] just on a Youth Council." In addition, they have involved "more youth than just WIA-eligible youth. We draw from lots of youth organizations from around the County."

Anaheim WIB Youth Council Partners with Youth Serving Organizations, Tailors Meetings to Support Youth Members

Marco Lucero of Anaheim talked about engagement strategies they have used on their Youth Council.

"It's been quite an experience over the past few years. Maybe many of the Youth Council members were reluctant at first to engage youth on the Council," Lucero acknowledged.

However, they proceeded slowly and gained confidence in their ability to engage youth as they went along. "[We had] one youth at first, then two; now [we are] up to six, from ages 16 to 22," Lucero reported. "I attribute that success to working with and recruiting from those organizations, activities, and programs that youth are already engaged in. We have a youth from California Conservation Corp (CCC); another from our local Employment Development Department (EDD); a third from a local community service project, Project Support a Youth; and another youth who's really, really active in many projects."

Lucero shared several successful strategies, related to qualifying youth for WIA eligibility, making meetings accessible to youth, engaging youth in meetings and encouraging adults to work with youth members.

"The strategy that we've used to qualify the youth as WIA eligible is to use the 5% eligible [proviso]," said Lucero. "We may recruit a low income youth who lives in a high crime zip code area."



Lucero shared several ways they help make the meetings accessible and appealing to youth. He reported that the first issue was timing. They moved our schedule back an hour and a half, from 2 pm to 3:30, so that youth could come after school. "We try to hold a one-hour meeting," he added, since some of the youth had other activities, like cheerleading.

Another practice they employ is meeting preparation. "We explore meeting with the youth a half an hour before hand, and we talk about the agenda and some of the items. When we recruit a new youth, I'll meet with them to find out what board activity they have been engaged in before." The Council members also go over the work plan at every meeting. "We [talk about how] work is progressing. Before it was very cut and dried. 'Here's what we are voting on. Let's go.' Now we spend ten or fifteen minutes at the end of each meeting to look at the plan."

Lucero pointed out that the issue for youth usually is "how to be comfortable around adults." The other side of this issue is that adults have insecurities too, about how to engage them. Lucero said that he works with adult Council members "to make sure they make every effort to connect with the young people. [This involves] listening. About half the youth have no problem speaking up. The other three need to be encouraged to speak by the chair." Lucero closed by saying, "The youth are the ones who consistently showed up. Some times we have had a quorum and they have been in the majority."

Highlights of Other Issues

Mentoring

Participants agreed that the job of mentoring is often taken on by a Youth Council staff person since they have time to meet with youth. However, everyone also agreed that it's preferable to share mentoring among all adult Youth Council members. One participant remarked, "When the Youth Council members are ready to act as mentors, it will be a much more enriching experience for young people."

Another participant suggested people consider a buddy mentoring system (with a buddy coordinator) so that each youth has an adult buddy. The buddy calls and reminds the youth of the meeting. They check in ahead of time, and prep the young adult and youth members about the issues they will be working on in the meeting. It's something that's not very time demanding, but it's very fulfilling for both parties.

Time Management

Successful youth participation involves a give and take from both the youth and the adults. Everyone agreed that it was important to make sure that a prospective youth member actually had time to participate. Talking with a youth before they join is important, to find out about other commitments, and to let them know what is involved in being on a Youth Council. On the other side, the adults need to tailor the meeting time and length to fit the youth's schedules. One participant remarked, "We really have to consider their time. [For the committees they are on] We let them drive meeting times, places, frequency."