

## Recruiting Youth Grantmakers and Structuring the YAC



**Because youth have so many options for extracurricular activities, an initial challenge is how to recruit and retain a diverse group of youth.** The question that then follows is how to best structure the youth grantmaking committee.

## Recruiting Young People

Who should be involved? Have a goal of forming a youth committee that reflects the diverse youth population in the community. While it may take several years to achieve this goal, a diverse YAC can provide a powerful learning experience. While it is helpful to have several demonstrated youth leaders involved from the start, resist the temptation to automatically invite just youth who are already involved in leadership activities. Their schedules are so busy that they may not have the time to contribute. Ask school counselors and other sources for youth who have leadership potential - the unsuccessful candidate for a school government campaign for example.

The average youth advisory committee (YAC) has 15 to 20 members. A YAC is often larger when a community foundation covers a number of school districts. Because one of the goals of a YAC is to provide at least a two to three year experience, recruitment focuses on 8th, 9th, and 10th graders. It is helpful to have each school represented by at least two students from each grade level because members will work together in distributing needs assessments, grant applications, and promoting the YAC. In the application form ask about school and community activities, community service history, leadership positions held, and why they would like to serve on a YAC.

Many YACs have used one or a combination of three recruitment tools: [a simple brochure](#), [a flyer](#), and an [application form](#). Customizable samples of these recruitment tools are found on the Youth Grantmakers website. Each may be downloaded to your computer and adapted to fit the needs of your YAC. Common to all three is text that highlights the duties of a YAC member, such as attendance at monthly meetings, and the selection process and timeline. These duties can be spelled out in greater detail in a job description that can be provided to youth who have expressed an interest. A [sample job description](#), based on input from many different YACs, is found on the Youth Grantmakers website.

### Potential recruitment sources include:

- School guidance counselors
- Churches
- Juvenile courts
- Sports clubs
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- YMCAs and YWCAs
- Candidates for student government
- Alternative schools
- Teen centers
- County 4-H extension agents
- Shopping malls
- Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
- United Ways and volunteer centers
- Home schoolers

Youth recruiting youth is the best possible recruitment strategy. Once a core group of youth is identified by the Steering Committee, consider appointing them to be a subcommittee to help the advisor and Foundation staff complete recruitment of the initial goal of 15 to 20 members. A helpful recruitment tool is the four minute video, *Youth as Grantmakers: In Their Own Words*, that can be accessed on the [youthgrantmakers.org](http://youthgrantmakers.org) website.

Once the YAC is operational, members take on the responsibility of recruitment and use a variety of strategies to accomplish this goal using a combination of the tools already mentioned. For example, some YACs develop a rating sheet with key criteria from their application form, such as school and community activities, commitment to the community, and leadership potential to assist in making its decisions. Others invite applicants to observe one or two meetings before having an interview. During the interview, the job description covering the responsibilities of a YAC member is discussed. There are cases where YACs have developed member contracts that new members sign to acknowledge they agree with these responsibilities. During the interview, the interviewer may share this contract to reinforce the duties of members.

As part of the recruitment process, many YACs provide a fact sheet with information on the community foundation for interested youth to share with their parents. Before an invitation to serve is issued, it is important to know that the youth's parent understands and supports this involvement. It is helpful for the advisor or community foundation staff to send a formal letter to the youth and his/her family confirming the invitation as well as to invite the parents to attend an orientation about the YAC to learn what their son/daughter will be doing during the upcoming year. This letter can include a schedule of future meetings. Sample letters written to the [youth](#), [his/her parent](#) and [his/her principal](#) are found on the Youth Grantmakers website. These documents may be customized to meet the needs of your YAC.

Rarely does a YAC need to say no to a potential member. The individual usually decides, after observing several meetings, that it is not their top priority. However, some YACs have become so popular that they receive more applications than there are spaces to keep the YAC a workable size. In such cases where an interested youth is not selected, the individual should be called and thanked for their interest and commitment to making a difference in their community. Encourage them to participate in a YAC committee, such as community service or special event.

With seniors graduating and planning for college or jobs, it is not unusual for YACs to have an annual 30% turnover in membership. Members need to understand this and recognize that each year one of the fall challenges is recruiting new members. Some YACs use the final meeting of the school year as an opportunity for graduating seniors to help identify underclassmen who should join the YAC in the next school year.

An ongoing challenge for most YACs is to maintain a diverse mix of young people. The YAC should continually challenge itself to recruit members who will provide different perspectives on youth issues. Experience confirms that it is easier for YAC members to recruit a friend than to call a student from an alternative school. One of the duties of the YAC advisor is to help the members identify and contact nontraditional recruitment sources. A diverse YAC provides added credibility to the foundation in its efforts to serve all populations. Recruiting new members becomes easier as other young people in your community hear that all viewpoints are listened to and respected in the YAC.

**Tips on recruiting for the foundation staff and advisor:**

- Research confirms young people are more likely to say “yes” to participate in service-related activities if they are asked to do so. But please remember to include the parents in the “ask” as well.
- Consider nontraditional sources for recruiting young people, such as alternative schools and the juvenile court system. Involve students who have the potential to be leaders.
- Students, who adults tend to identify as leaders, may be over-committed.
- Resist the temptation to take applicants on a first-come, first-served basis. It doesn’t always result in a good mix of young people on the YAC.
- Recruit at events where youth are, and involve youth from the steering committee in helping you make the “ask.” Attend and participate in teen forums where youth are focusing on issues of concern to youth.
- Encourage YAC members to talk about the YAC when they are involved in administering a needs assessment in the classroom.

## Structuring the YAC

A happy balance between structure and freedom is the key to sustaining membership. YACs that are too structured tend to alienate youth, and no structure at all frustrates members that prefer organization. The following guidelines are offered as effective ways YACs meet their goals for the year and, while doing so, make it an enjoyable experience for all.

- Establish a regular monthly meeting date and location and hold to it except for bad weather. Some YACs meet at school, others at the foundation office, and others at local restaurants. It is not unusual for a YAC to meet from 4:00 to 5:30 on a Sunday afternoon. As part of the calendar, identify key activities that will lead to the award of grants before the year ends.
- At the second meeting, elect officers for the year. The three key officers are a Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary. Some YACs operate with Co-Chairs, and others have a rotating Chair of the month to lead the meeting. The Chair is important because that person is responsible for facilitating meetings. The Secretary is important because the YAC and foundation need a record of attendance and minutes of the meeting. Handwritten minutes are acceptable. Some YACs will provide the Secretary with postcards to mail as meeting reminders. This is a task that the foundation office can also handle easily.
- Set aside time at each meeting for training on key issues, starting with how to run a meeting and build consensus in decision making, and effective listening to make sure all voices are heard. Some YACs will only vote on a motion when there is agreement by all that it is the right action to take. Consider having a half day retreat in the fall that can serve as the orientation for new members as well as a refresher for members coming back – a team building activity.
- Try not to allow a meeting to last longer than 90 minutes and make sure that food is included. Several YACs have elected a treasurer to be keeper of a petty cash fund, which means bringing the staples — pizza and pop — to meetings.
- Depending on the size of the YAC, encourage members to consider developing committees for basic activities, such as a nominating committee to help recruit new members; a needs assessment committee; and a fund development committee to work with foundation staff on donor and group presentations.