Between 1988 and 1997, 86 endowed youth funds were created by community foundations throughout Michigan as a result of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Youth Challenge to the Council of Michigan Foundations. Each community foundation agreed to creating a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) as a permanent advisory committee of the community foundation with the primary responsibility of making funding recommendations for grants from the community foundation’s endowed Youth Fund.

In addition, the Kellogg Foundation supported three other main goals for the YAC:
- To assess needs, assets, and priorities for area youth,
- To promote youth volunteerism and youth leadership,
- To increase the size of the Youth Fund through fund development activities.


This YAC Best Practices Manual is intended to provide YAC members and YAC Advisors with specific strategies they can use to work toward Best Practices.

This manual can be used as a supplement to “Track Our YAC: A Tool for Assessing Our YAC’s Progress Towards Best Practices,” an assessment tool for YAC members and Advisors to identify specific areas in which the YAC can improve.

A set of YACer Best Practices is also available to help guide individual YAC members.

### Best Practice 1: Meeting Frequency

Meets a minimum of seven times a year.

**Explanation:**
A YACs effectiveness is greatly increased when participants have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other members.

**Recommendations for YACers:**
1. Have an agenda for each meeting. YAC members should develop the agenda and run the meetings.
2. Have food available at each meeting.
3. Decide on a YAC calendar, and stick to it.
4. Have a consistent meeting place, time, and location.
5. Remind members about up-coming meetings or events through email, a phone tree, or mailed reminders.
6. Plan fun activities in addition to the YAC meetings.

### Best Practice 2: Membership

Has a minimum of 12 members ages 12–21 who reflect the many forms of diversity found in the local youth community.

**Explanation:** The YAC should strive to annually recruit new diverse members to become an integral part of its activities. A diverse YAC has members who vary in age, race, ethnic background, school, socio-economic level, personal/family history, interests, and academic/physical abilities. The size of the YAC can vary to fit the local community it serves, but a core group of at least 12 is vital to ensure that the YAC reflects many forms of diversity found in the local youth community. The median size of the 86 Michigan YACs is 20.

**Recommendations for YACers:**
1. Assess the diversity of the local youth community to insure that the membership of the YAC is representative of that community.
2. To expand the YAC’s diversity, come up with new and creative approaches to recruitment.
3. Develop an application form or conduct interviews with potential new members.
4. Target 13-15 year-olds for recruitment. A multiple year experience has the greatest impact on members and improves their ability to contribute as grantmakers.
Best Practice 3: Advisors

Has two trained YAC advisors provided by the community foundation who are knowledgeable and supportive of youth development and youth leadership.

Explanation: Two YAC advisors allows for greater flexibility and accountability. YAC advisors should be skilled in the area of youth development, be familiar with legal issues associated with youth work, and understand the operations of the local community foundation. The advisors should take advantage of training and technical assistance offered by Council of Michigan Foundations and others to increase their understanding of philanthropy and youth leadership.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Advisors should relate well to youth, be flexible, and be comfortable with ambiguity.
2. Advisors should provide support, not leadership. YAC members should organize, plan, and run YAC meetings.

Best Practice 4: Orientation and Training

Holds an annual orientation for all new members and encourages all members to participate in training opportunities that will strengthen their skills in philanthropy.

Explanation: Orientation is critical in providing context for new youth grant-makers. It introduces the concepts of philanthropy, endowment, foundations, grants, and non-profits. It also provides an ideal opportunity to demonstrate one of YAC's cornerstones: youth leadership. Equally important is ongoing training made available through organizations such as the Council of Michigan Foundations, which expand the grant-makers' understanding of philanthropy and youth leadership.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Current YAC members should plan and lead the new member orientation.
2. Include a grant-making simulation in your orientation.
3. Be sure to explain the YAC's relationship with the community foundation and role as a grant-making committee, and the importance of the needs assessment, community service, and evaluation.
4. Provide a "cheat sheet" of the acronyms and phrases that new grant-makers must know.
5. Check www.youthgrantmakers.org for sample training tools.

Best Practice 5: Assessment of Youth Issues

Assesses critical issues of area youth at least every three years.

Explanation: An understanding of the local youth community allows youth grant-makers to make informed decisions. Assessing the status of local youth may impact how proposals will be solicited (responsive or pro-active), which grants will be funded, or the types of community service in which the YAC engages.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Consider the pros and cons of different approaches to collecting information, including conducting surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, using existing data from other sources, or other means.
2. Consider partnering with other local youth-serving organizations to gather information.
3. Make sure that you are gathering information from youth who represent the many kinds of diversity found in the local community.

Best Practice 6: Grantmaking

Annually engages in a grantmaking process that is responsive to the critical issues of area youth.

Explanation: The grantmaking process includes development of grantmaking priorities (based on the results of the needs assessment), soliciting grant proposals, reviewing grants, making grant recommendations to the Board of Trustees, and evaluating the impact of grants on the local youth community.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Review and update the grantmaking process and materials each year.
2. Proactively seek grantees that involve youth in the development, implementation, and evaluation of projects and offer volunteer opportunities for youth in the project.
3. Encourage site visits by YAC members to potential grantees.
4. Consider making mini-grants in addition to large grants.
5. YACs that have no grant funds available can use their assessment of critical issues to guide engagement in community service projects or other community activities.
Best Practice 7: Evaluation of Grantees

Evaluates the effectiveness of each grant annually.

Explanation: An internal evaluation effort will help the YAC analyze its grantmaking to determine how the grants are impacting youth needs, assets, and priorities. A self-evaluation provided by grantees can insure accountability and help inform future grantmaking decisions.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Develop an evaluation process that helps determine the community-wide impact of grants made by the YAC.
2. Require grantees to submit an oral or written report so you can better understand how grant funds were used as well as the impact the grant had on the community.
3. Encourage site visits to evaluate the effectiveness of the funded program.
4. Seek feedback from young people who were directly involved in the funded program.

Best Practice 8: Participation in Community Projects

Participates in a community youth project annually.

Explanation: Philanthropy is defined as “giving time, talent, or treasure for the common good.” As yet another way for young people to be philanthropic, participation in community service is a cornerstone of YAC. It is a learning experience for YAC members, supports the community, and also increases the visibility of the YAC and community foundation.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Consider doing a service project with a grantee (it’s a great way to evaluate the grant at the same time!).
2. Use information from the needs assessment to select community service efforts.
3. Share opportunities for community service involvement with fellow YAC members. Obtain a list of volunteer opportunities from the local Volunteer Center.
4. Participate in the local “Make a Difference Day.”
5. Let the local TV station or newspaper know when you are working on a community service project. It could be great publicity!

Best Practice 9: Fund Development

Engages in fund development activities to assist with the continual growth of the endowed youth fund and the community foundation annually.

Explanation: New sources of gifts for the Youth Fund insure that additional grant funds will be available, allowing future YACs to be responsive to youth needs in the community. Unlike fund raising, which virtually all young people have experienced, participating in fund development provides a more accurate view of the various strategies to grow a community foundation.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Identify and implement a fund development strategy: Why should someone support YAC? Who might support YAC? How should the YAC approach prospective donors?
2. Get all YAC members and community foundation trustees to contribute to the Youth Fund!
3. Help out at receptions and fund-raising events for community foundation donors.

Best Practice 10: Youth on Board

Has at least one YAC member serving as a voting member on the community foundation Board of Trustees.

Explanation: Michigan law allows for youth age 16 and older to serve as voting members on nonprofit boards. A young person on the Board of Trustees of a community foundation provides adult members with a valuable perspective and the young person with a valuable leadership opportunity.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Community foundation trustees, staff, and young people must be accommodating and flexible in terms of openness, training, meeting times, etc.
2. Try a mentoring or "buddy" system partnering adult and youth trustees to increase understanding and allow for a greater comfort level.
3. If possible, two youth trustees are ideal. If only one youth trustee is possible, create a "shadow" trustee: a youth member who attends all the meetings without a vote, who will take over the trustee position after a period of time.
Best Practice 11: YAC/Community Foundation Relationship

Interacts with community foundation Board, Staff and Donors at least twice a year on a formal and informal level.

Explanation: Establishing relationships between YAC members and trustees, staff, and donors increases understanding of the various roles in the community foundation. It can also generate discussion about the ways in which youth and adults can work together for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Ask to attend the annual meeting and other special events of the community foundation.
2. Encourage formal recognition of YAC members by trustees, and staff.
3. Work together on a joint community service project.
4. Ask about opportunities for youth to volunteer within the organization.

Best Practice 12: Communications and Publications

Has activities highlighted by the community foundation’s annual report, web site, newsletters, public presentations and other communication tools.

Explanation: Communications provide increased understanding of the YAC and youth as resources to the broader community.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Develop and maintain a YAC website or the YAC page on the community foundation web site.
2. Offer to speak to community groups on the issue of youth leadership and philanthropy.
3. Prepare press releases about requests for proposals and grants that your YAC awarded.
4. Prepare and present public service announcements on local TV and radio about youth leadership.
5. Do the morning show on the radio station that your friends listen to.

Best Practice 13: YAC Self-Assessment

Conducts an annual self-assessment to reflect upon its strengths, challenges, use of Best Practices and opportunities for improvement.

Explanation: A self-evaluation allows members to reflect individually and as a group on membership, diversity and recruitment issues, training needs, grantmaking, YAC structure and group dynamics. The relationship with the community foundation and with the adult YAC advisors should also be assessed.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. Develop a process for identifying how the YAC could improve its activities.
2. Consider different methods for evaluating your YAC: surveys, discussion in large or small groups.
3. Survey YAC alumni to find out how their YAC experience has impacted them after they left.

Best Practice 14: Conference and Trainings

Participates in and attends the Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conference, Regional Trainings and Advisor Roundtables.

Explanation: YACers from around the state have different experiences, and it is important they learn from peers. CMF trainings enable YACers to meet and collaborate regionally in grantmaking and community service and learn about new initiatives in Michigan.

Recommendations for YACers:
1. The Summer Leadership Conference is always the 3rd or 4th weekend in June, so keep your calendar open!
2. Require the YAC president and executive committee to attend the Summer Leadership Conference.
3. Advisor Roundtables are free and are done via conference call for easy access.
4. If you have a topic or issue you’d like addressed at a future training, email the youth program associate.

For more information, contact Program Associate for Youth at 616.842.7080 or info@youthgrantmakers.org, or visit www.youthgrantmakers.org