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Tips for Engaging and Respecting Youth Representatives

Youth leaders collected data from the real-life experiences of youth and young adults who have served on various local, state, and national teams across the country. Based on these individual's experiences, the following tips were created to provide you with a pathway to creating a positive and equitable opportunity for youth and young adults to serve your initiative.

Diversity - Always ask yourself can we have a youth representative and is everyone that needs to be represented indeed being represented.

Networking - Cast a wide net when looking for representatives. Have individuals in your network send out the applications to individuals on their network to be certain the word gets out to any and all possible applicants. Other board members should open up their personal networks to the young adult member to help that person find other potential opportunities.

Authenticity - Try to avoid the concept of tokenism when having a youth representative on your board. If the youth representative is not provided opportunities for professional development, the process will be ineffective for both you and the youth representative.

Involvement - Allow equitable opportunity for the young person to give input in the role of leadership in discussion. If the young person feels like they're involved, they will get more from the experience and try their best to complete any task given to them. Writing an entry in a newsletter is important but not necessarily rewarding to that youth. When possible, allow them to interpret their desired involvement and attempt to make this concept become a reality.

Value - Provide financial compensation to the youth representative to help them to attend meetings. Many youth don't have the financial support or the means to be able to consistently travel and attend meetings especially on a national scale. If your organization cannot provide funding, help the youth find a means to allow participation. Always remember, they may be missing college classes or work to attend and may require additional support.

Intentional Mentorship - Create opportunities for the youth to engage with the group on a social level. This allows the youth to build relationships and encourages more buy-in.

Support - Provide a mentor to guide the young person through the learning curve when they first begin their work so they can understand the unique culture, language and what is expected.

Sustainability - Create a culture of mentorship giving the youth room to transition. Youth will age out but may still be interested in remaining involved in your work. If necessary, create new roles for these individuals to stay active.

