

Youth and Board Governance



Build Your Organization's Effectiveness



Recruiting young people (16 or older) to serve on boards benefits both youth and the organization they serve. Youth can serve:

- as full board members or as representatives
- in an advisory capacity to the board
- by actively working on committees

Defining Youth in Governance

Youth in governance refers to situations where youth work in partnership with adults to set the overall policy and strategic direction of an organization. Youth are involved in decision making and lead and may vote as a full, participating member of the board.



Benefits to the Organization

- adds youth perspective on industry or organization issues
- makes the board more inclusive and diverse
- appeals to potential funders
- mentors future leaders
- builds understanding of youth perspectives and fosters creativity across generations
- offers new perspective on technology uses for board operations

Benefits for Youth

- provides opportunity to make a difference in the community
- enhances development of life skills, such as social skills, communication, leadership, public speaking, meeting management and decision making
- provides training and work experience
- offers mentorship opportunities
- builds self-confidence connects youth to community and industry issues

Volunteering is a challenge, a privilege and an opportunity, not only for the individuals who volunteer, but also for the organization supporting them. Volunteer Canada – Volunteer Connections New Strategies for Involving Youth

Getting Started

Consider the following before you actively recruit young people for your board:

| | Yes | No | N/A |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Planning and Assessing Readiness | | | |
| Does your organization offer leadership opportunities for youth? | | | |
| Does your organization have a clear vision, goals and objectives for youth involvement? | | | |
| Is everyone in your organization committed to successful youth involvement? | | | |
| Decision Making | | | |
| Is there a plan for how your organization will involve youth in making decisions? | | | |
| Will your group add youth representatives to an existing all-adult decision making group? | | | |
| Will your organization involve equal numbers of youth and adults in decision making? | | | |
| Have you considered creating an all-youth body, such as a youth advisory board, youth planning committee, or peer mediation group? | | | |
| Governance | | | |
| Is your organization aware of the legal responsibilities of involving youth as decision makers? | | | |
| Are there policies or bylaws that prevent youth involvement from full participation on the board? | | | |
| Are there policies and bylaws to support youth involvement in board decision making? | | | |
| Have you addressed budget and staff issues related to youth involvement? | | | |
| Are the terms of office and voting rights similar or equal for youth and adults? | | | |
| Do you have a code of conduct and a conflict of interest policy? | | | |
| Do you have a policy for screening and educating volunteers to ensure the safety of youth and vulnerable persons? | | | |
| Are there opportunities for all board members to speak at meetings? | | | |
| Recruiting Youth | | | |
| Do you have a recruitment plan? | | | |
| Do you have a youth orientation plan? | | | |
| Has an adult explained youth involvement to parents? | | | |

| | Yes | No | N/A |
|---|-----|----|-----|
| Developing Youth/Adult Partnerships | | | |
| Does the board understand that youth members do not represent the voice of all young people? | | | |
| Are there opportunities for youth to develop decision-making skills? | | | |
| Is there opportunity for inter-generational learning/training? | | | |
| Is training available to support youth and adults in their roles on the board? | | | |
| Is there an empowered, accountable resource person committed to helping youth and adults build relationships? | | | |
| Do you have a system in place for feedback and recognizing successes? | | | |

Youth-friendly projects are those that:

- directly impact young people
- inspire youth to right a perceived wrong
- helps young people feel they are making a difference
- teach new governance and leadership skills
- have a fun and positive work environment

How to Successfully Involve and Engage Youth in Your Board

Now that you have successfully recruited youth to your board, the next step is to ensure that you are able to get youth involved and engaged in board activities. Here are some suggestions.

Young board members will feel more comfortable in a youth-friendly environment. Try to recruit at least two young people. Include social aspects to their involvement.

- Young people are engaged when they are respected, valued, trusted, appreciated, safe and comfortable.
- Youth are comfortable in less formal settings.
- Assign a supportive adult mentor.



- Attend to logistical details: provide transportation; arrange for youth to get community service or class credit for their involvement; plan meeting times and places compatible with youth's schedules.
- Host an orientation session for new youth members.
- Mentor youth on how to prepare for a meeting.
- Hold meetings at a time that works best for all board members. Be flexible for exam schedules and school activities.
- When assigning tasks, ensure that youth know why they are doing it and how it will make a difference. They like to see change and progress.
- Talk to youth about their authority to make decisions required to complete assigned tasks.
- Encourage success and help them learn from failure.
- Determine the best form of technology to communicate with youth (e.g.: email, text, or phone).
- Listen to youth members' ideas and carefully consider them.
- Provide opportunities for them to make decisions and learn new life skills.
- Frequently recognize success, privately and publicly.

Becoming a true team does not happen overnight. It takes time and understanding. Start small and celebrate successes.



For more information

- Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture and click on Industry Leadership
- Email us at leadership@gov.mb.ca
- Visit your local Manitoba Agriculture Office

Available in alternate formats upon request.