

Leading Successful Meetings with Youth and Adults

Part of “walking the assets talk”—doing yourself what you are asking others to do—is having both youth and adults participate in leadership and decision making in your congregation’s youth initiative. But how do you make sure that leadership teams that include both youth and adults are a good experience for everyone involved?

Getting Started

- Be creative and sensitive about meeting times and places. For example, if evening meeting times are not practical, meet for Saturday breakfast or on a weekday at lunchtime in the school cafeteria.
- Understand the needs of all participants. Offer childcare if needed. Provide meeting notes. Identify group members who can offer rides to others who need them.
- Since many youth don’t carry calendars with them, make reminder phone calls or send reminder e-mails or text messages a day or two before each meeting.
- If adults don’t know the needs of the young people on the team, have adults ask the young people and then ask again after a meeting or two.
- If youth don’t know needs of the adults on the team, have youth ask the adults and then ask again after a meeting or two.
- Serve snacks at meetings!

The basic framework of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets™ can be a useful tool for creating a healthy culture in all meetings in your congregation, including youth initiative leadership team meetings. Equally important, using the framework in this way reinforces and models the work you’re doing to build assets. These tips—linked to the eight categories of Developmental Assets—may help improve the positive climate of your meetings.

Support

- Take time in each meeting for people to connect with each other. This may include using name tags and starting with a warm-up activity that builds team relationships.
- Create a climate where people feel comfortable, accepted, and connected. If individuals seem disengaged from the group process, check with them to be sure that they do not feel alienated or ignored. If they are, work together to find ways to change that.
- Encourage team members to seek information, advice, and counsel from each other. Expect participants to respect each other.

Empowerment

- Actively involve team members in decision making and in shaping the activity plans for the initiative. Members aren’t really contributing if they are asked only to OK plans or ideas made by others.
- Make sure all group members feel valued and valuable as contributors. Recognize each person as a resource to the whole group.

Boundaries and Expectations

- Start on time, end on time.
- Work together to establish clear ground rules about how the group will work together—what's expected of individual members, what strategies will be used to solve problems, and how decisions will be made.
- Clarify expectations of the roles people play in meetings. It's a good idea to designate a facilitator, a recorder, a timekeeper, and a process observer.

Constructive Use of Time

- Use people's time wisely by carefully planning meetings. Seek input before developing an agenda, send the agenda out in advance, and be clear about the goal for each agenda item (discussion, decision, action, etc.).
- Near the end of the meeting, compile a chart of tasks to be accomplished by the next meeting and who is responsible to do them.
- Respect people's limits by not over-scheduling meetings, either in frequency or length.

Commitment to Learning

- Include opportunities during your meetings for learning about the community, about children and youth, and about asset building. Tell stories of what is happening with asset building in your initiative. Not only will this enrich people's understanding, but it will strengthen the group's ability to make thoughtful decisions.
- Give team members opportunities to research issues or ideas, identify resources, and then present what they've learned to the whole group.

Positive Values

- Articulate the faith values that guide your group's goals and activities.
- Do not tolerate jokes or stories that put down people.
- Set an expectation of integrity—team members should do what they say they'll do.
- Develop ground rules for team process that reflect commitments to being honest, respecting each other, and honoring commonly held values.

Social Competencies

- Build team members' capabilities and skills through such practices as sharing or rotating leadership roles among members.
- Nurture people's competence in working with a diverse group. This includes training youth and adult members in working together.

Positive Identity

- Develop a clear sense of the purpose and goals for your congregation's youth initiative. While you may not need a formal mission statement, it's important for people to be clear about why they are spending time together.
- Celebrate together. Celebrate the gifts of team members, the community, your accomplishments, and your hopes for the future.