

BENEFITS OF ENGAGING YOUTH AS DECISION-MAKERS...

For Organizations

- Engaged citizenry leads to decrease in social problems
- Builds increased understanding of organization programs
- Brings in new ideas and energy
- Increased youth participation equals increased parent support
- Considered a best practice - shows organization is ahead of the curve
- Meets funding requirements
- Develops a resource for the future (e.g. youth as potential interns, staff members)
- Great ambassadors to the youth market
- Increased engagement of those young people with whom you are connected
- Challenges the status quo

For Youth

- Gives young people work place skills
- Learn about different systems (government, corporate, and nonprofit)
- Build career skills
- Able to create a networking system for the future
- Increased self-esteem
- Encourages positive youth activity and involvement
- Can help change negative social perceptions of youth
- Exposure to diverse people, ideas and situations
- Introduction to more resources, support and role models

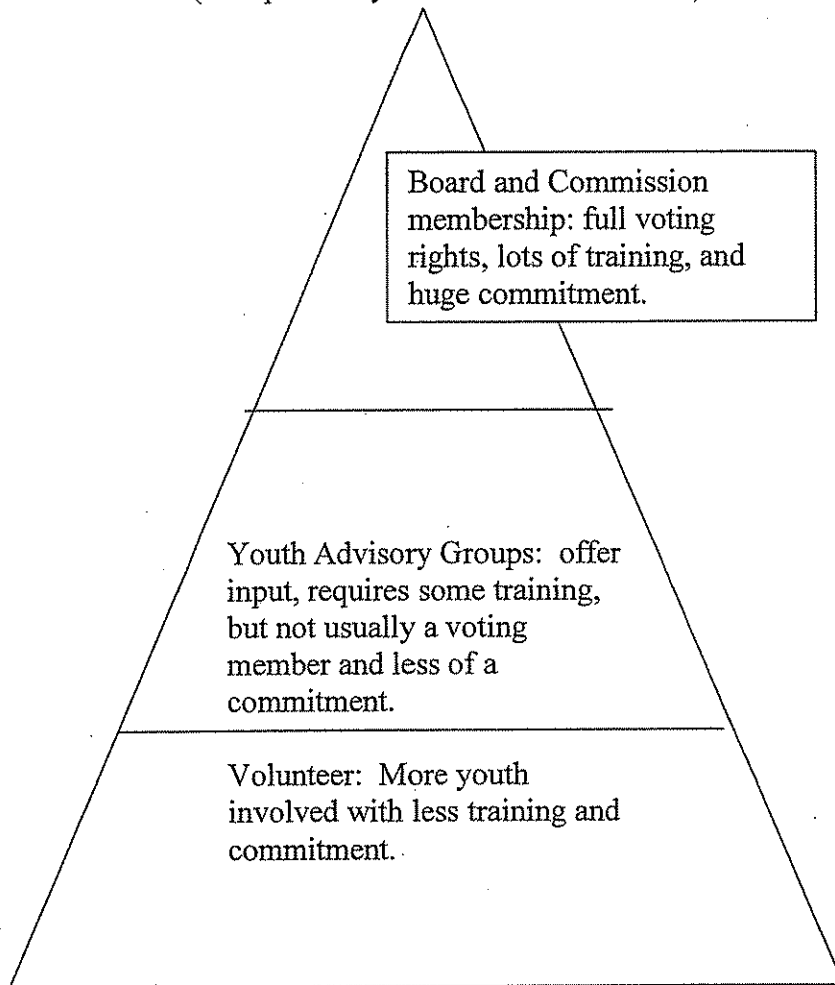
For Adults

- Obtain an increased understanding of young people
- Allows them to feel more connected to the purpose of their work
- Decreases chances of employee burn-out
- Challenges adult perceptions and stereotypes about young people
- Helps expand thinking professionally and personally
- Opportunity to teach skills
- Increases the energy level of the organization and department where young people work

Youth Initiative Definitions

Youth Action Council	Group of young people, typically ranging in age from 12-25, working with an existing organization to ensure that youth are involved in achieving the overall mission of the organization. Councils take on different shapes and structures based on the needs of the community and partnering organizations.
Youth Advisory Board	A group of young people brought together to serve in an advisory capacity to an organization or community. May act to determine funding expenditure, approve youth-related ideas, participate in community/organizational planning, or act in any number of related roles.
Youth/Adult Partnership	Efforts that involve young people and adults working together, sharing power, and learning from each other to build stronger communities.
Youth Development Approach	Way of working with young people that calls for providing youth with the developmental experiences shown to promote a healthy transition toward adulthood.
Youth Empowerment	Creating community service and leadership opportunities to build self-esteem and commitment to the community for the youth involved. Should include meaningful roles and decision-making ability.
Youth Governance	The ability of youth to lead and vote as a full participating member in an organization's board or governing structure.
Youth Infusion	The integration of youth into all spheres of community life and to ensure their voice and action are valued and utilized.
Youth Involvement	When youth are engaged and active in their communities as teachers, leaders, learners, participants, decision-makers, advocates, etc.
Youth Participation	Giving youth the power to make and implement decisions along with adults and giving them a share of the responsibility for the outcomes. Helps to develop and practice leadership skills as well as experience a sense of belonging.
Youth Summit	Meeting which brings together young people to discuss needs and issues for youth or the community-at-large. Allows youth the opportunity to voice their concerns and develop possible solutions to these concerns.
Youth Voice	The ideas, opinions, involvement and initiatives of young people.

What role do you want youth to play?
(Hampton Mayor's Youth Commission)



Lowest tier *usually* views youth as objects.

Middle tier *usually* views youth as recipients.

Highest tier *usually* views youth as partners.

The more involved youth are, the more training they should receive.

Youth can serve as volunteers, as members of an advisory board, or as full voting members.

Some boards/commissions or roles are more appropriate for a specific age group.

Meeting structure and content must be age-appropriate.



14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making

Point 1: Know Why You Want to Involve Young People

- **It's a civil rights issue:** Nowhere in the U. S. Declaration of Independence is there a stipulation concerning age. "All men are created equal." All are entitled to "certain unalienable rights." So why is it that in this country decisions that affect a significant segment of the populations are made by others? In far too many situations, young people are not being heard. Their rights are being disregarded or violated, and adults do not seem to hear or care about it. This needs to change. A shift is needed in our communities to allow young people's concerns to be heard and taken seriously. They have the same right as adults to voice their hopes, ideas, and fears.

- **It's a long-term growth issue:** Educating youth about the ideals of the nonprofit sector and community service can plant the seeds of social responsibility in their heads. Similarly, youth can provide a new generation of leadership. Some organizations have looked around and noticed that everyone on staff and in decision-making positions is getting older. Adding young people to the governance of an aging organization can usher in a new generation of leadership.

- **Develop clear goals and objectives:** It is important for everyone in your organization to determine the exact reasons why you want to involve young people in decision-making roles. Defining objectives is a way to create a benchmark for your group. While larger goals will keep you focused in the right direction, your

objectives will lead the way. Objectives should be specific, tangible, and attainable.

Point 2: Conduct an Organizational Assessment

- **Assess your readiness:** The purpose of conducting an organizational assessment is to determine what is needed in order for youth to be successfully integrated into your governance structure. Are you already strong in most areas related to supporting youth involvement, or do you have specific areas for major growth?

- **Investing your board and staff:** Assembling a board committee to research and help prepare for youth involvement can be an excellent way to invest your board in this idea. You can also include individual conversations with all board members to make sure they understand and support youth involvement. Your staff can be the cornerstone that makes this project stand. In many organizations, staff members support new young members by helping them prepare for meetings or by providing transportation. This kind of undertaking can be a great way to foster a deeper relationship among your staff, board, and young people.

- **Investing young people:** Recruiting for new youth members is a great chance to educate the youth in your program about the role of your governing body. It is important that the young people with whom you work understand what the group does and know that young people play an integral role.

Point 3: Determine Your Model for Youth Involvement

- **Two general approaches:** All of the approaches to youth involvement fall into two general categories:
 - 1) **Involve young people directly in an existing adult governing body:** for example, add several youth positions to an existing board, church council, community task force, city commission, or advisory board; or
 - 2) **Create an all-youth or youth-run adjunct body.**

Point 4: Identify Organizational Barriers

- **Institutionalize youth in governance:** Organizations need to move past youth in governance as a good idea and build it into their structure. Most governance bodies involving youth have written into their bylaws that a certain number of members must be young people. If you are creating a youth advisory group, ensure that it is a permanent structure, not one that will disappear with a change in administration.

- **Conflict of interest:** Many organizations recruit among youth currently involved with their programs. It can be a real asset to both the governing body and a youth member if she or he is already familiar with the program. You may, however, encounter concerns about conflict of interest. Your group should establish clear conflict of interest guidelines and apply these to any potential new youth or adult members.

- **Budget and staff considerations:** The idea of involving youth may appeal to your organization, but there are budget concerns to address. Do you have the staff time, transportation funds, and the petty cash for such things as reimbursements and refreshments at evening meetings?

Point 5: Overcome Attitudinal Barriers

- **Adults must overcome their own stereotypes:** We all have stereotypes about young people. To work well with young people, we must recognize these negative assumptions and learn to share real authority.

- **Youth need to know that they deserve to have a say:** Young people deserve to have their voices heard. Recognizing this isn't always easy because we are so often told that young people have nothing to say. Youth need to recognize their own value.

- **Speak a common language:** Most professional settings speak a very "adult" language, using jargon, abbreviations, and references to organizations only commonly known to adults. When young people are involved, ideas must be presented in a way that allows everyone to understand.

Point 6: Address Legal Issues

- **The obligations of board members:** Above all, the directors of a nonprofit corporation are bound by two general types of legal duties: A **duty of care**—the duty to perform their responsibilities in good faith and in a manner that they reasonably believe to be in the best interests of the corporation, and with such care as an ordinary person in a like position in a similar corporation would use in similar circumstances; and a **duty of loyalty**—the duty to keep the interest of the corporation paramount above personal interests when acting for or on behalf of the corporation.

- **Legality of young people serving on boards:** Because each state makes its own laws, you should check to see what the laws are around youth governance in your state. For the most part, you will find three different kinds of state rulings: 1) A law that

says it is legal for youth to serve as directors with age constraints; 2) A law stating that it is not legal for young people to vote on boards if they are under a certain age; and 3) No law on the issue at all.

- **Contract considerations:** Though many boards do not often enter into legal contracts, it is important to note that age-specific contract laws do exist. Your board should research the contract laws in your state.

Point 7: Recruit Young People

- **Be clear about what you want:** As with any strong team, a governing body should reflect an even balance of interest, skills, and diversity among its members. There are some characteristics that are important for every member of your governing body to possess and some skills that only a few members need to have. Before selecting new members, consider creating a governing body profile—a simple list of characteristics already found in the group, as well as those skills you hope new members will possess.

- **Choose motivated and committed youth:** You will want to choose a youth member just as you would any other governance body member. Consider individual strengths. Be sure the person you select has the commitment, motivation, and time to make his or her involvement work. Never select a young person just because you think it would be a good experience for her or him.

- **Add two or more young people:** Adding more than one young person to an adult governing body offers more support to youth in governance positions. It is important that young people not feel alone or isolated in your group.

Point 8: Create a Strong Orientation Process

- **New member orientation:** Your orientation program for new members should clearly outline the basics of your organization's mission, programs, structure, and history, as well as a forthright description of the relationships among your staff, board, and funders. You should also review the roles and responsibilities of your governing body.

- **Letter of agreement:** All members should receive a detailed letter of agreement that describes their term and responsibilities. This agreement clarifies expectations for all parties and solidifies commitment.

- **Parental orientation:** In addition to conducting an in-depth orientation with young people, it is important to help their parents or guardians feel comfortable with your organization as well. Parents play an important role in the success of your young board members. Parents or guardians should know at least one individual from your group.

Point 9: Train Young People for Their Roles

- **Training for young people:** Young people will need skills training that covers reading budgets, working on committees, and other bits of governance-related knowledge. Many groups go as far as setting up a buddy system, pairing a seasoned member with each new member to handle questions, advice, and general support.

- **Training for adults:** Most adults have never carefully considered the assumptions they hold about young people. Before bringing youth into the governance of

your organization, your governance environment should be inviting to them. For your adult members, this means exploring their own stereotypes about youth and learning to be good allies for young people.

- **Be innovative:** Unfortunately, when most of us think about training, we get stuck in the classroom mentality—endless lectures and textbooks. But learning can be a lot more interactive and experimental. There are scores of people, places, activities, books, and films that we can learn from. Which ones are right for your group?

Point 10: Conduct Intergenerational Training

- **Intergenerational training:** Once young people are in decision-making positions, you will need to continue training the whole group. This is a wonderful way to foster interpersonal relationships among your members and further diminish any tensions that may exist because of age. The focus of intergenerational training is to bridge the gap between adults and young people so they can work more effectively together.

- **Keep it fun:** Don't underestimate how important it can be for people to laugh together. Adults can be a bit tight-lipped when discussing some of the topics that should be included in intergenerational training (such as how youth *really* view adults, and vice versa). Laughing allows everyone the freedom to let go of his or her inhibitions for a little while.

- **Listening is key:** The most important thing that can happen during this training is that people really listen to each other. Don't worry as much about getting through an agenda as creating space for participants to open up and hear what each other is saying.

Point 11: Make Meetings Work

- **Meeting times:** Your meeting times may conflict with young people's schedules. While young people may not have teleconferences to keep them from meetings, they do have basketball games, school play rehearsals, and family engagements. They, in fact, have less control over their time than most adults do.

- **Interactive agendas:** Everyone appreciates an engaging meeting. A few small changes to your meeting structure can help everyone be involved, especially young people. Include small group time where everyone has a chance to speak. Go around the group and ask each person to give feedback. When reviewing a budget, do it in pairs, and always make sure there is plenty of opportunity to ask questions.

- **Use appreciations:** How often does it happen that you are plugging away at work, not getting much done, and maybe even feeling a little hopeless about how much more you have to do? Then someone walks by and says, "Hey! You're doing a really good job. Thanks!" You return to your work, but the load feels a little lighter. This is the power of appreciation. We suggest that you create a regular structured time for appreciations during meetings, because many work settings are just not in the habit of doing this kind of thing.

Point 12: Develop a Mentoring Plan

- **Recommended for new members:** When joining a group, new members of all ages can use the advice of a buddy who already knows the ropes. Young people are unique because they seldom have prior professional experience. Mentors, whether they be experienced adult or youth group members, provide critical support to

young people by helping them learn new terms, understand organizational culture, and build confidence to act as full partners in the group.

- **Know your responsibilities:** In order for mentoring to work, mentors should know what's expected of them. There are a range of responsibilities that a good mentor should have, but most importantly, mentors should make sure that new members attend meetings, have the support they need, and are well-oriented to the organization they have joined.

- **Tips for new young members:** Young people should remember that their mentors are there to help them. In order for this relationship to run smoothly, young people should, among other things: trust their mentor; ask lots of questions; and speak up when they have an opinion.

Point 13: Build Youth/Adult Relationships

- **Relationships are of primary importance:** Strong relationships are key to all successful programs and social change movements. From local community efforts to international movements, it is a solid network of committed people that creates social change. This human caring is where deep, permanent transformation comes from.

- **Adults, go easy on yourselves:** Adults tend to have a bad habit of being hard on themselves. They often feel they don't do enough, or that they should have it all figured out by now. Blaming yourself or other adults is never an effective path to change. We need to recog-

nize that anything we understand about working with young people is wonderful.

- **Remember the importance of involving parents:**

It is vital to include parents right from the start. Get to know them. Share information with them. Answer their questions. Invite them to events. Appreciate them and the work that their child is doing for your group. Convey to them your enthusiasm for the work you're doing. In addition, let young people know that you are going to be talking to their parents. Let them know that you are not checking up on them or breaking any confidentiality, but that talking with their parents will insure that they know how important young people are to your organization.

Point 14: Create Support Networks

- **Network young leaders:** As adults work to forge strong relationships with young people, they must be mindful of the relationships that youth build with each other. Young people on boards of directors, city councils, or in other leadership positions can be excellent support for one another. By being networked with other youth leaders, young people see that they are not alone in their work and that other youth care about the same issues.

- **Adults, support each other:** It is not easy to remember that you need support too. As adults working with youth, we tend to put our own personal growth and ourselves on the back burner. Just as youth need the support of other youth, allies to young people need opportunities to talk with one another about their experiences.

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Defining the Role of an Adult

Describe Job Here:

Answer the following questions about the job:

1. Specifically, what will this person need to do to make Youth-Adult Partnerships work?
2. How is this different from existing jobs in the organization?
3. What kind of resources (time, training, other) will the person need in order to be successful?

Answer the following questions about possible candidates for the job:

1. What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other qualifications are necessary to succeed at this role?
2. How could you determine if someone was suited for this role?

* Adapted from: Youth Empowerment: A Training Guide, © 1990 Camp Fire, Inc.

Defining the Role of a Young Person

Describe Job Here:

Answer the following questions about the job:

1. Is this a real job? What is its usefulness to the organization?
2. Will this position lead someone to greater responsibility in the organization?
3. Is adequate support and supervision available from the staff? Do staff know how to supervise?
4. What skills, training, experience, and knowledge will a young person gain from this job?

Answer the following questions about possible candidates for the job:

1. Who will really want to fill this role? Is this work that is of interest or value to some youth? Why?
2. What knowledge, skills and attitudes are necessary to succeed in this role?
3. How can you adjust the work schedule, quantity of work accomplished, quality of work accomplished, nature of training, responsibility for others, degree and kind of supervision, formal reporting requirements, and other parts of the job so that more youth might qualify?

* Adapted from: Youth Empowerment: A Training Guide, © 1990 Camp Fire, Inc.

Sorting out the Options for Youth Involvement

The following checklist has been designed to help you determine what might fit with you/your organization. Check the boxes that apply to your vision for youth involvement-- check as many as apply and then star your priorities!

Youth as.....

- Volunteers
- Interns - paid? Y N
- Paid staff members

Involvement on.....

- New projects
- Already existing projects
- Youth-initiated projects

Youth on.....

- Boards of Directors
- Youth advisory councils

Projects lasting...

- 1 day
- 1 week - 1 month
- 1 month - 6 months
- 1 year
- On-going

Age/school level....

- Elementary school - grade (s) _____
- Middle school
- High school
- Recent HS graduates/college-age young adults

Numbers of youth....

- One or two young people
- Small teams (3-8)
- Medium-sized teams (8-14)
- Large teams (15+)

Youth who....

- Are greatly at-risk
- Already receive support but need guidance
- Are very independent and need little guidance

Support provided...

- By older youth or youth program alumnus
- By adult community or staff volunteers
- By adult staff members on a paid basis

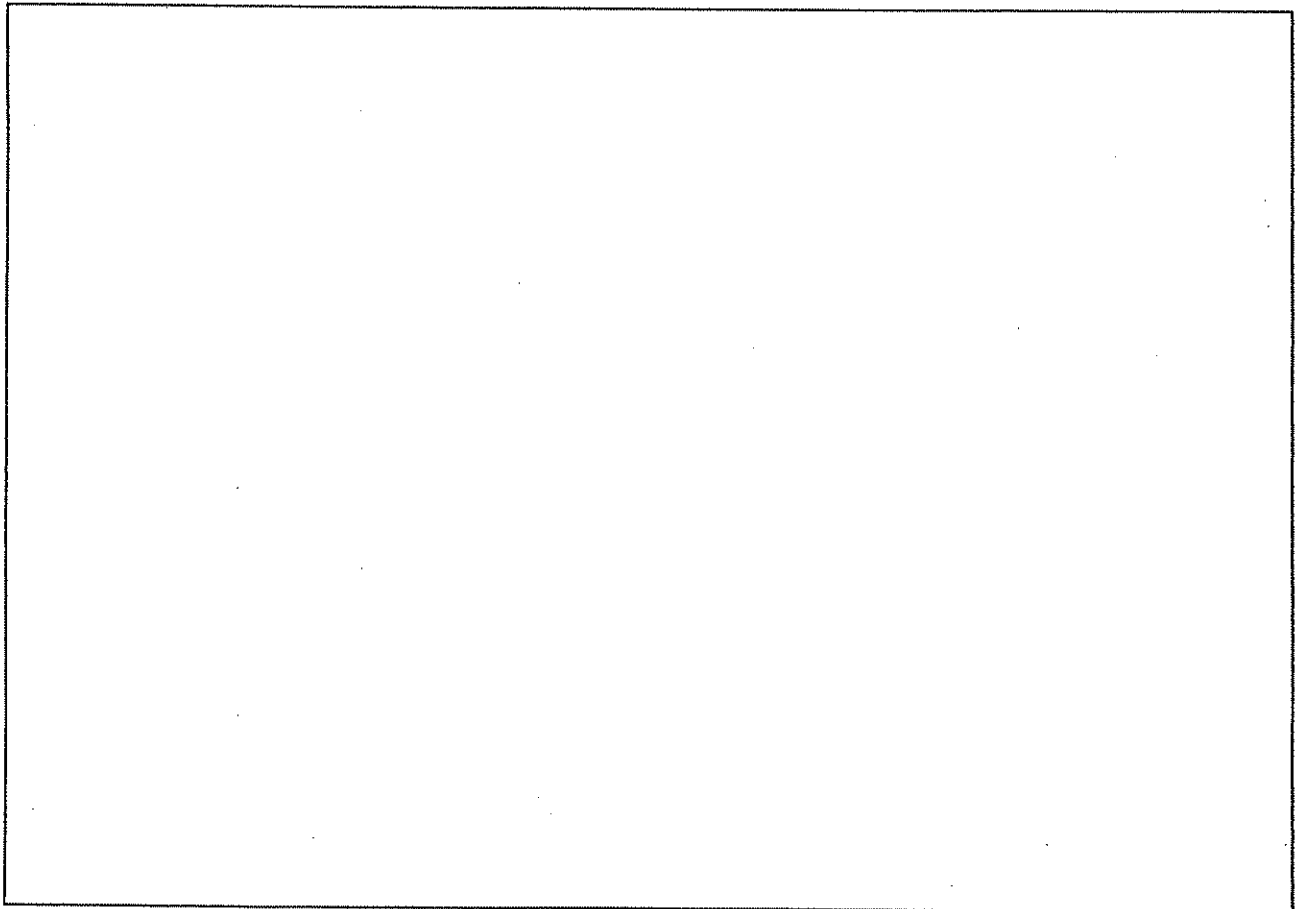
Financial support

- Is available - \$ _____
- Is not available



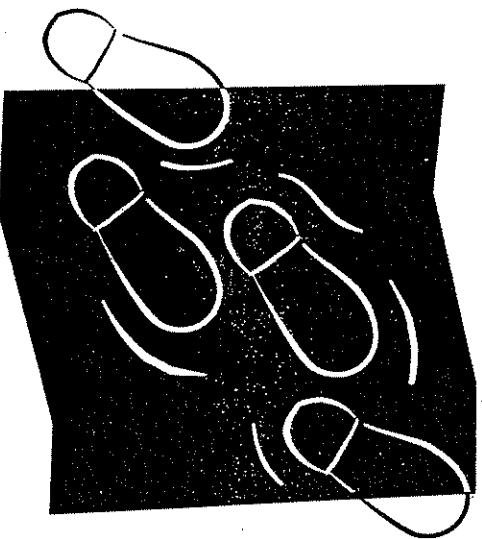
MAPPING YOUR PROGRAM FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

- Write the mission or purpose of your program/organization at the top of the box.
- Draw a map of the program/organization beneath the mission statement, include the relationship of the program/organization to the community as a whole, school, businesses, parent...anyone or anything affected by the program/organization.
- With a different color pen, highlight the points at which youth participate. What roles do they play? What kinds of responsibilities do they play?
- With a different color pen, highlight new opportunities for youth to participate. What are these roles? How will you make this happen?



What is the Youth Commission?

The Hampton Youth Commission is a diverse and dynamic group of high school-aged young people. We represent Hampton youth on issues that are important to them. The Youth Commission is an opportunity for youth to have a formal role in the city's planning and decision-making process.



Shaping the Future

HYC HIGHLIGHTS



- Rewrote the city's bicycle ordinance and assisted in the development of a city-wide bikeway system.
- Awarded over \$40,000 to youth initiatives.
- Youth representatives on city boards, commissions, and advisory groups.
- Public forums on various topics.
- Developing recommendations on four key youth issues--youth space, transportation, employment and community interaction - to various policy-making groups.

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HAMPTON
YOUTH
COMMISSION

Established January 1998

What do
YOUTHINK??

Contact Us!

Phone: (757) 728-3285
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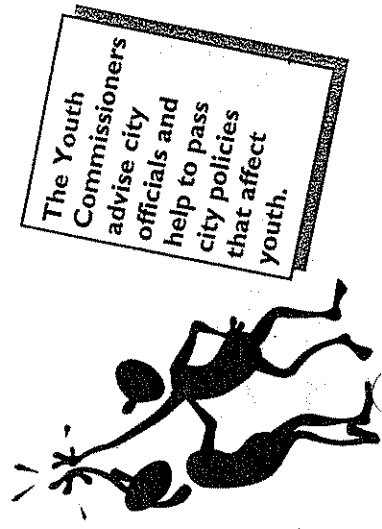


Vision

Young people with the power and voice to shape the future of Hampton.

Mission

To provide an opportunity for youth to have a formal role in the City's decision-making through a representative Commission that addresses youth issues.



The Youth Commissioners advise city officials and help to pass city policies that affect youth.

When do we meet?

HYC runs through September to May.

Commission Work Sessions are held the first Monday of each month from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Alternatives Training Facility.

Public Meetings are held on the third Monday of each month from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., unless otherwise listed. All meetings take place in Council Chambers in City Hall. We discuss issues that affect youth and work together on ideas for community change. Any young person or adult can attend and speak. If the Commission cannot directly address your concern, we will make every effort to put you in touch with someone who can.

What are our goals?

- Provide a powerful youth voice for the city of Hampton.
- Champion our own component of the city's Comprehensive Plan.
- Appropriate funds to youth initiatives through our grant program.
- Maintain an effective, efficient, and youth-friendly organization.

What are we working on this year?

Caring Relationships

This topic is about relationships in the community that have an impact on youth. We want to increase the positive interactions youth have in the community.

Youth Space

This topic is about places to go and things to do. We want to make sure those places are youth-friendly and accessible to young people.

Employment

This topic is about the employment opportunities available for teens. We want to make sure we are prepared for the workforce of the future.

Transportation

This topic is about how young people get from place to place. We want to make sure the transportation system is youth-friendly and accessible to youth.