



**create a**  
**YOUTH COUNCIL**  
**in your community**  
**in 10 easy steps!**



Developed by the Rural Youth Working Group  
of The Ontario Rural Council (TORC)

# Create a **YOUTH COUNCIL in Your Community** *...in 10 Easy Steps!*

## **A Youth Council Toolkit**

Now, more than ever, community leaders are realizing the positive connection between involving youth in community activities and the increase in overall community vitality and engagement. Youth bring new energy and ideas to standard issues and concerns, often with a unique perspective as to how best to tackle challenges and opportunities.

If you're looking to create a community that encourages youth to become involved, or you are a young person looking for an opportunity to voice your opinion and make a difference, we invite you to read on for tips and best practices in creating a Youth Council in your community or within your organization.

Keep in mind this Toolkit is a general guide. There is no right or wrong sequential approach to establishing a Youth Council. You do not have to approach the process in the order here presented. In fact, some of the steps might need to happen at once...or even months apart.

However you choose to go about it, we challenge you to consider these suggestions and tips to be the stepping stones towards greater youth participation and impact in your community.

Read on to find out how YOU can make it happen!

*This **Youth Council Toolkit** was developed by The Rural Youth Working Group under the auspices of The Ontario Rural Council (TORC) ([www.torc.on.ca](http://www.torc.on.ca)) and in partnership with Endeavor Volunteer Consulting Network (EVCN) ([www.evcn.ca](http://www.evcn.ca)) – 2008.*

# The Goods

**What is a Youth Council? .....4**

## **The 10 Easy Steps:**

- 1. Identify “Champions” .....5**
- 2. Recruit Participants.....7**
- 3. Determine the “Why” .....11**
- 4. Establish Roles and Responsibilities.....14**
- 5. Set Goals.....16**
- 6. Outline Activities.....17**
- 7. Secure Funding.....21**
- 8. Ensure Sustainability.....25**
- 9. Have Fun! .....30**
- 10. Evaluate Progress.....32**

**Tips for Rural.....35**

**Acknowledgments.....37**

**About TORC.....38**

**References.....39**

# What is a Youth Council?

(versus a Youth Centre...versus a Youth-Led Association)

## Youth Council

A Youth Council is a formal “board” of young people that provides representation or a “voice” for youth in the community. Youth Councils are typically associated with an organization or a government body (e.g. municipality) to which they provide recommendations and guidance around issues affecting young people. The structure and activities of the Youth Council often reflects the organization to which it is associated. Youth Councils can, in some cases, be stand alone groups. In addition to informing government or organizations, Youth Council members may also act upon issues of importance to them. Councils facilitate the involvement of young people in local governance and decision-making.

## Youth Centre

Youth Centres provide services to young people in the community. They can include arts and recreational gathering spaces, employment services, and faith-based groups. Youth Centres typically have staff, infrastructure and equipment for youth. Many have substantial budgets in order to deliver their services. It is best practice for the services of a Youth Centre to be designed and delivered based on the input of the youth involved.

## Youth-Led Association

Youth-Led Associations are often activity-based, such as theatre groups, volunteer groups and environmental groups. The structure can differ depending on the situation and those involved. In some cases, they are affiliated with a partner organization and established with short-term funding or a grant. Some have infrastructure and staff, others do not. These Associations can last for years or be created to carry out a small project. The common element is that they are created for youth...by youth.

## Which Model is “Best”??

There is no “best”! It is important for communities to have a combination of *all three* in order to fully engage young people. Different youth will respond to, and be interested in, different types of organizations.

Although this Toolkit is focused specifically on the Youth Council as a model to provide youth “official decision-making power” in their communities, keep in mind the ideas herein can also be applied to a Youth Centre or Youth-Led Association.

# I. Identify “Champions”

## A Real Winner!

It is important to have at least one person who is willing to “champion” the idea of the Youth Council to the community. Being a champion requires supporting the idea, mentoring the participants, searching for partners and funding, and generally keeping the process moving forward. A champion is often someone who has a lot of connections in the community.

The **Champion** could be:

- An experienced youth
- A parent
- Local school teacher
- Youth Centre or Youth-Led Association stakeholder
- Municipal staff or Council member
- Organization staff or stakeholder
- Other community member
- Social worker
- Employment counsellor
- Sports figure

## CALL OUT!

- Keep in mind the champion and the Youth Council president are two different roles, fulfilled by two different people. While the champion oversees formation and sustainability, the president actually operates the Youth Council for a set period of time.
- A champion should be someone who supports the concept of Youth Council participants as decision-makers versus imposing his/her own ideas or personal agenda. If the champion is not a youth, he/she needs to act only as a resource or sounding board.

## No Youth Council is an Island

You can’t stand alone! A Youth Council should reach out to other people in the community as much as possible. Partnerships are an important part of your Council’s overall success.

Partners can assist with activities, spread information, pursue sponsorship, offer advice and recruit new members. Partners can also help generate Council exposure in the community. Others are typically more likely to pitch in and help if they know about your Council and feel a connection to your “cause”.

Build relationships with partners early on! Consider inviting them for pizza at the end of your meeting; ask them to present to your Council on a topic of interest; casually meet and tell them what your Council is doing. Keep in mind as a Council, you can also collectively brainstorm your own ideas for fostering partnerships.

Possible **Partners** may include:

- schools - principals, teachers, Student Council members
- Municipal Council - Mayor, members, staff and representatives
- elders' groups, parents and interested community members
- Youth Centres, community organizations and service agencies - Lions and Optimists Clubs, 4H, youth employment centres, church groups
- friendship centres
- local business owners
- police department
- local newspaper or radio station

## 2. Recruit Participants

### PEOPLE POWER!

#### Youth Council Members

Youth Councils differ in size. It might take some time to settle on what size works best for your Council.

A typical Board or Council consists of ten to 12 participants. But your group may decide to recruit the same number of youth participants as there are participants on your corresponding Municipal Council/organizational board. Alternatively, you may wish to use geography as your determinant, choosing a number of representatives from different towns in your region.

No matter the number of participants you determine is right for your community Youth Council, keep in mind it's always a good idea to work towards recruiting extra members, as people are busy and may not always be able to make each meeting. This, too, will help to ensure *quorum* - the minimum number of people required at the meeting to ensure decision-making capability. (The City of Calgary has 30 young people on its Youth Council!)

The recruitment of dedicated youth members is the most critical factor to the success of a Youth Council. Keep in mind, though, it's not always as easy as it sounds. In fact, many Youth Councils find this to be their number one challenge!

Consider the following when trying to encourage youth to be involved:

- 1. Youth apply to be *involved* instead of appointed.** Young people want to be active participants, committed to the cause. They will dedicate a lot of time and energy to organizing events and running programs for youth.
- 2. Balance flexibility with structured commitment.** Some Youth Councils have encountered challenges with recruitment when they've tried to institute consequences for non-attendance. They simply discovered it does not work to punish people; you end up alienating the very people you're trying to embrace. Instead, create a flexible yet accountable environment. Make sure each member clearly understands the general expectations of participation. Within that, allow them to be involved to varying degrees, asking them to be upfront about their

desired level of commitment. In other words, encourage prospects to inform the group if they aren't able to attend or take part in something and make that "okay". Some people prefer to be involved in simple, short-term tasks that allow them to explore their interest in the Youth Council. Others will initially show up just for the food and social activities and eventually warm up to participation. Allowing flexibility leaves interested members with no excuse for not joining the Council. It also allows participants to slowly gain the skills and knowledge necessary for full involvement. Finding the right balance of structure and flexibility is an art!

3. **Make it about them.** The activities of the Youth Council should be driven by its members. Get new people involved through an annual survey of issues and assets in the community, with an option to sign up to plan and organize activities. If there are frequent new members on the Council, the reassessment of activities should also take place often to make sure said activities reflect current participant's needs. If people are only showing up for pizza and then leaving, they should be asked what else they would like to be doing and how the work of the Council could better entice them.
4. **Diversity.** Actively recruit members of different gender, religion, race, socio-economic conditions (e.g. homeless youth), family structure (e.g. foster children, one-parent households) and sexual orientation. It helps ensure a variety of viewpoints is represented and encourages creativity in discussions.
5. **Range of ages.** Recruit younger youth who can learn from older youth about how the Council works and potentially take on a leadership role in the future. This is called succession planning.
6. **Demonstrate the benefits.** When recruiting participants, let them know how involvement can benefit them. Participation could count towards required volunteer hours for high school students. Some might be interested in meeting new friends or building their resume. Have participants brainstorm the benefits and then make sure others know about them.

## **OTHER TIPS**

- Invite people! So often there are those who want to be involved, but have never been asked. Challenge each existing Youth Council member to personally invite another to take part. The personal touch goes a long way.
- Make announcements at schools



- Promote on Facebook, MySpace, email, website and other online vehicles
- Hang posters in places frequented by youth
- Place an interesting, eye-catching article in the newspaper
- Provide a "hook" - like pizza - to bring people to Council meetings
- Ask community Champions, Adult Advisors and other local leaders to recommend possible participants
- Be clear as to what it means to be part of the Youth Council; build excitement and momentum behind the idea
- Host fun and interesting activities that will attract others to the group
- Attract members by focusing on a specific skill-building activity, such as publishing a magazine or creating an educational video, which provides a sense of focus, fun and accomplishment.

## **Worth Saying Again – No Youth Council is an Island!**

A Youth Council is often, though not always, associated with a municipality or an organization/institution to which it provides advice and recommendations from a youth perspective. Within this framework, the Youth Council does not operate on its own, but rather, typically fosters a strong relationship with the Board of Directors and Adult Advisors connected to the organization/institution.

### **Board of Directors**

This is a group of Adult Advisors. One or more of the Youth Council members may also sit on the Board of Directors of the institution. The Board of Directors works to ensure the Youth Council's projects fall under its mission and helps the group reach its goal and objectives.

### **Other Adult Advisors**

Also referred to as Mentors, Facilitators or Youth Coordinators, Other Advisors could include occasional help like an accountant or lawyer. Adult Advisors support the Youth Council's goals and are willing to commit their time and expertise.

Advisors should be people who have knowledge and experience the Youth Council can tap into regarding issues like: how municipal government operates, where to look for information, possible funding/project partners, and how to build a budget. In some cases, the Adult Advisor is the liaison between the organization and the Youth Council, or can be a paid staff support for the Council.

It is best practice for the Youth Council to clearly outline the extent or degree of involvement of the Adult Advisor. As an example, it could be agreed the Adult Advisor will sit in on Youth Council meetings but will not be granted permission to speak unless invited to do so.

*“One of the key issues that we face with the Northumberland Youth Advisory Council is the challenge of engaging youth from various backgrounds and communities of interest. Often one makes assumptions that young people are a “single group” or demographic. In fact, if anything, the opposite is true. Age, issues of transportation and access to services -- particularly in more rural areas – as well as peer group interests, contribute substantially to attraction and retention of members for Youth Councils.”*

*–Jamie Simmons, Northumberland Youth Advisory Council*

## 3. Determine the “Why”

### WHY is a Youth Council Important for a Community?

One of the key determinants in creating a Youth Council is to first identify WHY it is required. The reasons will be slightly different for each community.

Unfortunately, not everyone will consider a Youth Council to be as good an idea as you do. You might have to “sell” the concept to some key people in the community. Knowing WHY you want to create a Youth Council will help develop the case for why potential partners should support it.

Here are some reasons identified by existing Youth Council members as to WHY they felt motivated to create a Youth Council in their communities:

- A Youth Council provides young people with a **forum to voice their needs** and gives them an **opportunity to make a difference** in their community.
- Every community can benefit by actively involving youth in local governance. By involving young people, not only are they guided into **meaningful activities**, they can also **learn about citizen involvement** as they help **identify and solve community problems**.
- Youth Councils can help **build relationships across generations**. In many cases, youth members form mentor relationships with adult champions, partners or advisors.
- **It’s good for your health**. Limited community resources and support in rural communities can lead to higher crime rates and the abuse of drugs and alcohol. A survey of Grade 8 students in the rural, northern Ontario community of Blind River revealed the top three reasons students participated in illicit activities were peer pressure, low self-esteem and boredom. The good news is that other research indicates youth who are engaged in structured activities are less likely to use illicit drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol. They are also less likely to engage in risky sexual or violent behaviour, drop out of school or become depressed. They have higher self-esteem, are more physically active, obtain higher grades and show a greater commitment to their families, friends and communities ([www.tgmag.ca/centres/litrev2.htm#a3](http://www.tgmag.ca/centres/litrev2.htm#a3)). A Youth Council is one positive outlet for young people.

- Similarly, Youth Councils can help rural youth, who are sometimes more removed than their urban counterparts, **to be less isolated**. It gives young people a reason to come together and to share mutual interests with each other.
- **It can spread the workload.** Young people often have tons of energy to contribute to community development activities. Adults often find themselves not having enough time to accomplish all that they would like. Youth Council volunteers in communities around the world are helping to get stuff done!
- **It can be fun!** The reason for creating a Youth Council need not be any more complex than the fun factor. Perhaps the youth in your community just need an excuse to come together and focus on things that interest them.

## WHY is a Youth Council Important for Your Community?

For many communities with successful Youth Councils, the first step – even before the Council was formed – was to host a **Needs Assessment** event to focus on the interests and objectives of young people in that particular community. In some instances, the event was just for youth. In other cases, both youth and adults attended and collectively brainstormed.

These community events can be presented in many different formats, from a small group meeting to a large conference. Choose the format that works best for your community and start sending out the invitations!

At the event, focus the discussion on identifying the needs of youth in your community and the activities that can be created to address those needs.

Some questions to ask:

- What are the needs, issues and/or challenges of youth in our community?
- What skills or resources of our community youth will capably address those needs? (a skills inventory)
- How can a Youth Council, as a whole, contribute to the cause?
- What do Youth Council members want to learn or experience through the Youth Council?
- How can youth effectively participate in planning activities and making decisions?

Remember, all it often takes to ignite a Youth Council is the rallying around just one activity that helps to address the needs of youth in your community!

## Let's Be Positive!

Sometimes it feels like adults only focus on youth in the community when there is a crisis or something has gone wrong. Contrary to this, many of the most successful Youth Councils are created from a focus on the “assets” or good things that youth have to offer.

Communities around the world are realizing that young people are one of their most valuable assets. They have the available time and energy...and a ton of creative ideas! This realization is leading to decidedly increased community support for Youth Councils.

Therefore, once you've determined your community's youth “needs”, try shifting the collective thinking towards the notion of community “assets”. Arrange an “asset mapping” process in your community, whereby residents are asked to identify their most valuable community resources, why they are important, and rank their order of importance. The benefits of this type of activity are twofold:

1. community residents reach consensus on what is important to them as a group
2. community residents to learn to appreciate others (<http://www.rural.gc.ca>).

More information on asset mapping can be found in the *Canadian Rural Partnership Asset Mapping: A Handbook*, available by visiting [http://www.rural.gc.ca/conference/documents/mapping\\_e.phtml](http://www.rural.gc.ca/conference/documents/mapping_e.phtml)

*“One of the most interesting things that happened with the Airdrie Youth Council (Hyjinx) was when we participated in a debate for a proposed city-wide youth curfew. There had been lots of vandalism occurring in the city and this was a solution that City Council was considering. We were approached by some young members of the community who wanted our help in fighting the curfew. We spent many hours doing research, getting opinions from people in the community and coming up with other solutions for the vandalism problem. We compiled the information into a speech, which we brought to Council, that said what the problems were in the community, why the curfew would not work and what could be done instead. In the end, Council agreed that the curfew was not the best solution and, instead, the Airdrie Anti-Vandalism Committee was formed. The biggest challenge we faced was the fact that we were youth. In our community, in particular, it is very difficult to get adults to listen to youth and actually take them seriously. The most important thing that I learned from this event was to always stand up for what you believe in. Also, I learned that just because I am young, it does not mean that my opinion does not count.”*

*-Amanda Webb, Hyjinx (Airdrie Youth Council) Member, City of Airdrie, Alberta*

# 4. Establish Roles and Responsibilities

## WHO'S DOING WHAT?

### Youth Council Group Agreement

An established group agreement, or **Terms of Reference (TOR)**, can provide a guideline for how the Council members will interact, especially at meetings. If a Youth Council is being created for a municipal government, a TOR will be needed for formal approval and future modifications.

The group agreement or TOR should describe the purpose and structure of the Youth Council. It can include guidelines such as:

- Who will take part: size, age range and general make-up of group
- Commitment timeframe of participants
- Frequency and duration of meetings
- Identifying when participants are able to speak within a meeting (e.g. flag, ball, stick)
- The role of adults at meetings
- Identifying and outlining individual roles and responsibilities of youth members, e.g. chair/president, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, or notetaker
- Activities required of Youth Council members

The group agreement can be created by the Council, as a group, once it is first formed and then referred to, and modified, as needed. It is advisable as many Youth Council members as possible get a say during the creation of this document because the Council will work more diligently towards a goal it can call its own.

Start with a brainstorming session where group members decide how they want to work together and agree upon a set of guidelines under which everyone will feel safe participating. Make sure to evolve broad concepts - such as the need to feel respected - into more concrete guidelines using specific examples, such as, not interrupting group members while they are speaking (Sadler, 2006).

## Adult Participation

Roles for adults can vary from advisor to facilitator to coordinator or subject-matter expert. Adults do not have to be involved in all aspects of a Youth Council.

**TIPS** on how adults can be effectively involved and communicate with young people:

- Train youth and adults to be involved in mutual goal-related activities. A partnership is the end result!
- Do not involve youth as "tokens" on adult councils where a few youth are only there to make the adult council look "youth-friendly". Bitterness and frustration can easily develop if youth do not get a chance to actually contribute their skills and opinions.
- Young people's involvement should be valued, but their level of involvement should be clearly identified. Make sure both youth and adults understand their relationship to the decision-making structure, rules and regulations. All too often, youth appear to be offered power, but then find themselves with very little, as negotiation and decision-making takes place behind the scenes.
- Don't let "adultism" develop (belief by some adults that contributions by young people are less valuable than their own). Adults may feel youth lack competency or commitment on a council. Finding common issues and shared interests will create an environment where youth can thrive rather than feel forced to adapt and adopt adult practices.
- Create an equal opportunity for young people to get involved. This means creating environments and policies that appeal to youth and their schedules. Youth often have conflicting interests and commitments in the "after-school" timeframe. Transportation can also be an issue. Unique meeting solutions may need to be created to satisfy youth and adults.
- Policies and standards for youth should be provided, evaluated and continuously improved as youth involvement and requirements change. Without constant fine-tuning and enhancement, councils can dissolve or progress can slow causing youth disengagement and frustration. In the best case scenario, youth members feel involved and come back as adult mentors (Matthews, 2003).

## 5. Set Goals

### Ready, Set, Goal...!

Every Youth Council should have a **Goal Statement**. The goal outlines the big picture as to why the Youth Council comes together and to what end it dedicates its time and effort. Each Youth Council determines its own goal based on the issues of interest/concern and assets it has identified.

Some sample goals include:

- **Create a healthier community for youth**
- **Develop an organization that is well informed of youth issues**

If you are still having challenges identifying your main area of concentration, list possible activities and use any common areas to identify Council goals. Don't be concerned over the thought of activities possibly changing in the future, as your goals can also evolve and be modified over time.

It is typically best if the Youth Council creates and agrees upon its goal(s) as a group. Call a meeting and brainstorm ideas. Designate one person to write the Goal Statement and distribute it to the others.

The goal(s) could be recorded on something other than a flip chart, such as a flag, ball, or another object the group chooses. Consider, too, posting the goal(s) on a website. Use it in any marketing you do and get the message out!

Be sure to keep referring to your goal(s) on a regular basis once identified. All of your activities should relate to them.

#### **CALL OUT!**

- The Goal Statement should stay broad and visionary; a long-term focus yet specific in outlining objectives towards fulfilling said goal(s).
- Review the goal(s) on an annual basis, especially if the Council has introduced new members over the course of the year.



## 6. Outline Activities

### The Meat and Potatoes

Once the Youth Council deals with setting up its structure, it can move to the more interesting task of figuring out what exactly it wants to do!

The processes that Youth Councils use to make this decision may all slightly differ but, typically, the common denominator is the need to ensure each member has a say. What's more, the specific activities the Youth Council carries out should always directly relate to the objective(s) outlined in the Goal Statement.

### Events and Activities

Often, a Youth Council will hold an annual planning meeting to determine priorities for the year. A brainstorm of all possible activities can be narrowed to something manageable based on the amount of time members have to volunteer. Focus on one (or maybe two) activities at a time. Finish one activity before moving on to something else to ensure it is completed to its full potential and to minimize the possibility of members becoming overwhelmed. If the Council is unsure as to how long an activity will take to complete, or the amount of effort that will be required, don't hesitate to call upon adult mentors for advice and direction.

It could be wise to begin by undertaking small projects or events that are likely to be successful as a way to promote the Council and cement your status within the community. This will invite the Mayor, Municipal Council, organizational representatives or other members of the community who have perhaps doubted your commitment to now reconsider the benefits and potential of a Youth Council.

In March, 2007, *The Ontario Rural Council (TORC)* hosted a Rural Youth Forum in Belleville, Ontario which drew an estimated 150 young people to address the challenges and opportunities of young people in rural and remote communities.

Youth from across the province engaged in fulsome discussions around a number of targeted topics. The resulting TORC Rural Youth Forum report ([www.torc.on.ca](http://www.torc.on.ca)) highlights the issues youth identified as being of utmost importance to them. Some of these included:

- Gainful youth employment

- Stereotypes that limit youth / eliminating the negative images of youth
- Transportation
- Teen pregnancy and substance abuse
- Homeless youth
- Little or no consultation of youth in political decision-making processes / lack of youth representation / voice on town councils, boards of directors
- Teen depression, peer counselling
- Youth entrepreneurship
- Healthy downtowns (no matter how small) and a limit to sprawl
- Lack of sports and recreational activities

This list could be viewed as a great starting point from which a Youth Council could begin to focus their attention. Take one of the issues that relates to your community and come up with a strategy to address it. Undoubtedly, Youth Council members will have a variety of other ideas for activities that are relevant to the local community. Be creative!

## Advising the Institution

Youth Councils affiliated with a municipality, organization, service agency or other group might be asked to give advice to the institution at times. This could include advice on things happening in the community that affect youth (e.g. what should be included in the local anti-bullying campaign) or a youth perspective on issues that affect everyone in the community (e.g. whether a new ice rink should be built and, if so, where).

As members of the community, the “youth voice” is important and needs to be included in decision-making.

If an institution is seeking the advice of your Youth Council on important issues, consider yourself lucky – youth in many communities do not have that opportunity!

If institutions are not seeking the advice of your Youth Council, consider informing them anyway. Write a letter or suggest a presentation on the issues your Youth Council believes is of importance to your community. Urge them to take the Youth Council seriously – be persistent!

### CALL OUT!

- Plan events for all ages and diverse groups
- Plan events involving the community
- Ensure youth have a voice on community issues that affect them

- Give members on the Youth Council specific 'stuff' to do -- assign tasks (or ask for volunteers) for each event or activity
- Form sub-committees to work on certain activities, if appropriate. This can help overcome transportation problems and allow for more frequent, informal meetings to get the work done.
- Keep track of the events the Youth Council carries out. Note the event, the date, the number of participants, what happened as a result of the event and any other important details. This information will be useful in the future for funding applications, as well as providing a history of what the Youth Council has achieved since its inception.

## What Other Youth Councils are Up to...

*Examples of successful activities of existing Youth Councils from across Canada*

- Hosted youth dances in the township community centres
- Developed a summer arts program that included floating three sculptures on the local pond
- Collaborated with a University of Waterloo professor on a 'photo-voice' project that will also serve to provide direction on upcoming projects
- Made caramel apples at a 'Buy Local' food event
- Participated in a Youth Leadership Day at a YMCA outdoor centre
- Presented findings to City Council
- Heightened awareness of health and nutrition amongst youth, and how to get more involved in the community
- Significant environmental leadership featuring: an action plan for town council; public meeting with the MPP and MP; advocacy aimed at the MP on the Kyoto Accord; educating the public through the press; garbage clean-up days; initiation of the "Green Award" to recognize environmental leaders in the region; calls for greater public transport; advocacy to clean up the local canal
- Promoted local history by helping to host tours of old buildings
- Planned a regional Battle of the Bands with over 600 attendees
- Hosted/moderated a Mayoral debate and provincial election debate
- Raised \$150,000 dollars in six (6) months for a local skate park (!!)
- Created an Aboriginal Drum Group
- Sent seven (7) members to the TORC Rural Youth Forum in Belleville (ON). They came back energized and focused. They felt they had contributed to the Forum and were glad to be involved in an organization that could make a difference for youth
- Successfully put into action an Earth Day clean-up at a local public school
- Organized a corn maze for youth at the soup kitchen
- Successfully lobbied for smoke-free bylaws, including parks and playgrounds
- Successfully advocated against a curfew

# 7. Secure Funding

## Show Me the Money!

Depending upon how many members sit on your Youth Council, and the types of projects you're undertaking, the amount of funding required will vary. For a small Council, it might be sufficient to obtain funding through small fundraising events, while a larger Council might need to look into obtaining local government support.

All organizations should have at least three to five funding sources in order to be sustainable. This will help protect the Council if for some reason one type of funding ends. There are at least four basic types of funding support a Youth Council could consider:

- Institutional Funding
- Special Events / Selling a Product
- Donating "One-Off" Money, Stuff and Time
- Social Enterprise

## Institutional Funding

This category encompasses funding from:

- Municipality or other government body
- Organization (e.g. Community Futures Development Corporation or United Way)
- Religious group
- Well-established business or retailer
- Service club (e.g. Rotary Club)

If the Youth Council has been 'championed' by one of these types of institutions and is associated with them, the likelihood is strong that it is currently receiving funding from them. If the Youth Council is a stand alone group, it could consider applying to a local institution for a grant.

Many institutions have formal processes in place for funding applications. They tend to be quite structured and require applicants to pay heed. Obtain the required application forms and consider gaining assistance from an adult mentor or someone who has experience in completing similar forms.

For sure, a downside of institutional funding can be the application processes, which are often time-consuming and arduous. Keep in mind, too, the Youth Council may first have to agree to certain guidelines in order to be eligible for the funding. This may well limit the Council's freedom to do what it wants.

On the flipside, a benefit of going the institutional route is the significant funding that could be awarded if successful in the application process. That money can provide great opportunity to achieve desired goals! (Canadian Heritage, 1995)

## Special Events / Selling a Product

This type of fundraising is often a necessary first step towards obtaining other forms of funding as it demonstrates Council members are serious and committed to their cause.

Ideas include:

- Bake sale
- Car wash
- Garage sale
- Ticket sales to a 'Battle of the Bands' / dance / fashion show / art exhibit / music show / dinner, etc.
- Sale of calendar / chocolate bars / t-shirt, etc.
- Auction
- Carnival
- Walk-a-thon, rock-a-thon, dance-a-thon, etc.

Fundraising themes should be innovative and reflect the interests of targeted attendees. Just because an event worked for another organization does not guarantee success for *your* Council. It's always a good idea to brainstorm ideas and then let a community mini-survey determine the winner. Before committing, be sure to verify there are no conflicting events in either your community or the region.

Persistence is necessary when it comes to fundraising - and it can be a lot of hard work! The biggest focus should always be placed on sales, for if no one comes or buys the product....what is the point?

Sometimes the profits from a fundraising event can appear to be rather insignificant, at least relative to an institutional grant. Don't despair. In many cases, there is a direct correlation between success and the number of times an event is carried out. So, for example, by the third staging of your 'Battle of the Bands' event, word will have travelled and people will know it's a not-to-miss event worth the money!

Think of your Council fundraisers as a win-win situation. In addition to raising necessary funds, you're creating opportunities to:

- practice skills and gain experience in sales
- work on team building among Council members
- spread the word to others about the Youth Council
- recruit new participants and foster partnerships
- have fun!

(Canadian Heritage, 1995)

## Donating “One-Off” Money, Stuff and Time

Businesses, organizations or individuals may also support the Council through donation of:

- Small amounts of money to help with an activity (e.g. money to build a parade float)
- Supplies (e.g. flip charts and pens)
- Venues / space
- Product or services donation for the purpose of fundraising (e.g. free movie tickets for charity date auction)
- Volunteer time (e.g. offering to chaperone an event)

When staging an activity, approach the money issue in terms of "Who will give this to us for free...or inexpensively?" instead of "How can we pay for that?" For example, rather than organizing a youth dance budget around the deejay's fee, contact budding young deejays who may be willing to charge a nominal fee in return for exposure.

For one-off donations, your Council may need to agree to certain terms. For example, if you are getting money to build a float for a parade, the Council may be asked to create a banner with the sponsor's logo/message on the side. Approach businesses that may have a related interest in supporting the initiative, for example contact a bakery or supermarket for a bake sale or electronics store for concert sound equipment.

However, a word of caution when choosing sponsors or supporters: Consider whether the values of the potential sponsor are in-line with that of the Council. If a certain business exhibits values you do not share as a Council, they may not be the best source for funding. Getting money is not the only issue to consider – the comfort level of the Council takes top priority.

## Social Enterprise

This refers to a business that makes a profit which it then 'gives back' to support a social cause. In some cases, a social enterprise also employs people with financial problems.

There are examples of Youth Councils initiating social enterprises as a way to make money to support themselves, or a specific cause, while also employing Youth Council members. One example is the Red Cross Youth Council in Ottawa which started a business making chocolates to support its projects.

## TIPS

- Many youth initiatives have been successful at attracting resources using social networks like Facebook.
- Visit the Rural Philanthropy Resource Network for more information about developing a plan for funding at [www.ruralphilanthropy.ca](http://www.ruralphilanthropy.ca)

## Thank you

Don't forget to recognize sponsors and supporters with a certificate of appreciation from the Council, a thank you letter or a more creative and personalized recognition.

## Money Management

Once you have the funds you must manage it well to ensure everyone on the Council knows where it is being allocated. If the Council has institutional funding, it might also be necessary to report to the institution on how the money is spent. The rules around this should be laid out in your Group Agreement / Terms of Reference.

In many cases, there is an adult coordinator who sets up a bank account, has signing authority for the account and keeps track of the budget. The coordinator might also be responsible for reporting to the institution on budget issues, if applicable. In some instances, one or more members of the Youth Council will also have signing authority or will assist with budgeting (e.g. the Treasurer or Chair). This presents a terrific opportunity for young people to practice money management skills!

Even if the adult coordinator helps with managing the funds, the Youth Council members generally make the decisions on what activities the money will be spent. Once again, these decisions should be made as a group.



## 8. Ensure Sustainability

Once the Youth Council has been established, it takes work to make sure it operates for a long time, or is “sustainable”. Key Council priorities should be financial sustainability, raising awareness and retaining members.

### ‘Keep the Money Comin’!

It is vital for a Youth Council to have ongoing or continuous funding to be able to effectively do all the things it wants to do within the community.

Council members should be cognizant of the terms of their start-up funding. Often times the initial funding from an institution (e.g. the municipality) ends once the Youth Council is up and running, or it shifts to a diminishing basis, meaning less money becomes available to the Council each year. The thinking behind this initiative is to provide funding early on for the Youth Council to get off the ground and then, once it is operating, its members take responsibility for securing ongoing operational funding. That explained, take note: This is often easier said than done!

### CALL OUT!

- Search for funding based on the type of chosen community project (e.g. government-based funding for health initiative or community organization-based funding for a joint event/project)
- Cut down on costs and spend wisely early on so as not to exceed grant money
- Change ideas, be resourceful or shrink the project to match available funds
- Consider applying for charitable status so that your Youth Council is eligible for more grant opportunities
- Create innovative fundraising events to cover expenses while waiting for your charitable number and subsequent grants

### Local Fame

One way to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Youth Council is to continue to foster relationships and build networks in the community. If people are aware of your group and its initiatives, they’ll be far more willing to support it financially. Media is a tremendously effective vehicle for this and can be employed to promote the mission of the Council and its various activities.

Connect with community newspapers, television, radio and the Internet. For those in rural areas where media is limited, a little creativity may have to be introduced.

**TIPS** for creating Youth Council exposure and building awareness towards sustainability:

- Host local events to increase exposure to community members (e.g. build a float for the Holiday parade)
- Keep local, regional and even provincial government frequently updated about who you are and what you're up to – government goes through the same staff turnover as other employers. Make sure your connections and contact lists are current
- Partner with a community newspaper to get a regular article published, such as a “Youth Council success story” or a “youth of the week” piece.

Take advantage of every opportunity to be in the public and media's eye!

## Keep Members Happy

Remember, as a Council you're only as good as the members who sit around your table. Keep energy levels high and engagement strong! Conduct regular and informal outreaches to connect with your members and monitor how things are going. You want to ensure those involved feel as though they're gaining something from their participation and not getting burnt-out, bored or overwhelmed.

A Youth Council should at all costs avoid depending too much on any one individual. This prevents individual 'burnout' and also provides opportunities for others to grow and learn as they take on responsibilities.

Create a welcoming atmosphere for any new (and existing) members of the group. Try developing a buddy or “mentor” system, scheduling a special low-stress first meeting, and/or providing an information package about the Youth Council. Someone should also be designated to talk one-on-one to all new members to ensure they understand how meetings are run and what activities the Council is currently working to fulfill. Review the Group Agreement with new members and ensure no outstanding concerns. This type of conversation can go a long way towards making new people feel comfortable and welcome at their inaugural gathering.

## Regular Meetings

Hold regularly-scheduled meetings on consistent dates. Allow for flexibility to accommodate the schedule of youth members.

Scheduled meetings allow Council members the opportunity to participate in discussions and receive progress updates. It also keeps the Council in an “active” status, which will help keep members engaged and enthusiastic.

From a financial point of view, having regular and productive meetings can demonstrate that good things are being achieved by the Council, and this appeals to sponsors/supporters/champions.

All members should be encouraged to actively participate. If it appears someone in the group rarely speaks up, be intentional about asking his/her opinion. If there are people who dominate the discussion, consider putting a process in place to tactfully address the issue.

### **CALL OUT!**

- Discussion should progress from positive topics to negative issues, then end on a positive note.
- Give everyone a chance to contribute – pass a 'talking stick' or another object in one direction around the table/circle and only allow the person with the stick to talk. This will give quiet members a chance to speak without calling on them by name and will keep overbearing speakers in check.
- Listen to overbearing speakers for a useful statement, and then ask "What do others think of this point?" to clearly move on to others.
- If a member goes off on a tangent redirect him/her back to the topic of discussion without sounding critical or angry. Note the time limitation, indicating the need to return to the main issue, and support the speaker's ideas while putting him/her on hold and returning later.
- Remain neutral. Do not align your perspective with only one opinion - especially your own! (Priest and Gass, 2005)

## **Rewards and Recognition**

Rewards are a fun way to recognize those who have contributed to the Council and also keep people engaged and motivated.

Consider holding an appreciation event on a regular basis and recognizing members through small token offerings, such as badges, certificates or even thank you cards. This lets the individual, other members, and external stakeholders know how much the volunteers are appreciated and respected.

Larger tokens of appreciation are also a consideration and can be donated or purchased for rewards (e.g. iPod, tickets to a show, certificate to a local restaurant). One approach would be creating an internal contest with a reward for the “winner”.

Take note, it is by no means mandatory to offer physical rewards. The opportunity to work towards the resolution of challenges and the fulfillment that comes with the positive results of the Council’s hard work, will provide sufficient enough reward to members. It will also be what keeps driving them to do more. All the Council need do is take time to reflect on, and celebrate, its successes!

## **Plan for the Future**

There should be a process in place for when leaders of the Council leave the group. This is known as ‘knowledge transfer’ and is vital to the sustainability of the Council. This process will ensure that valuable knowledge gets passed on to the new leader(s) and the Council won’t suffer as a result of the change over. A protocol or formal procedure around this process should be written into the Group Agreement or Terms of Reference (TOR). The protocol would offer details as to how one ascends to a leadership role and gains the necessary experience, trust and aptitude for such a role. For example, a member may have to first fulfill the role of Vice President of the Council or may have to first Co-Chair the group. The outgoing leaders should be asked to write a summary or give a presentation of key things learned and status of current activities.

Consider creating a formal mentorship program for your Youth Council. In this, each new participant who joins the Council is paired with an experienced member to teach them how the Council works and provide them friendship and support.

## **TIPS on Sustainability**

- Recruit, recruit, recruit! Search out new, motivated members
- Work on team-building
- Foster an environment of respect where individuals and their opinions /ideas are embraced and accepted
- Consider whether adaptation is needed for the executive
- Accept different ages and participation levels
- Stay relevant; keep pace with changing issues and youth interests

- Have a liaison with the Municipal Council
- Partner with other agencies and individuals who have suggestions for activities to ensure you are supporting and giving back to your community
- Work with adults to help keep things organized

## 9. Have fun!

Participation on a Youth Council is less likely to be successful if it is all work and no play. It has to be FUN as well!

### THE 4 'F's

#### Fun

Do not underestimate the importance of fun. Council members can do serious work, but still take time to enjoy themselves. Although certain “boring” elements like having an agenda must be part of the process, newer and more creative elements can be introduced at meetings so that members don't feel like they are at school and being lectured by someone.

Adding in fun elements like team-building games and ice-breaking activities for new members also encourages members to actually come back. Establish a collaborative environment where everyone is free to comment and voice their concerns. They will feel more engaged and appreciated.

Even the “serious work” the Youth Council undertakes can be fun. Many Youth Councils have been responsible for getting skate parks built in their community – what could be more fun?!

#### Friends

Based on common interests and activities, the Youth Council can be a venue for people to make life-long friends. It can be a place to meet new people or get to know people better. It is amazing how working together on an activity to help better the community can bring people together!

What's more, since participants are committed to working towards a common goal that is constructive to the community, it minimizes the risks of some getting into trouble since they now have a better place to “hang out”. Youth Councils can have an impact on reducing youth crime in a community.

#### Food

Pizza, Pizza, Pizza! Experienced Youth Council participants note the importance of having food at meetings. It could be the sugar rush from the doughnuts or the energy from the meat on the pepperoni pizza, but ultimately it helps attract people to meetings without the Council needing to spend exorbitant amounts of money.

## Freebies

Similar to offering free food, freebies like pens or notepads do not cost a lot but can be a nice touch and attract people to meetings.

In addition to “physical” freebies, free transportation is something that is important for a lot of Youth Council members, especially those who live in more rural areas or those who don’t have access to vehicles and can’t be dropped off or picked up. By eliminating the worry around how to get to and from Council meetings, members will be more motivated to attend and eager to participate.

*“The CEYC holds “socials” at which the group has the chance to just hang out, get to know each other outside of volunteer meetings, and build friendships. Subcommittee chairs are encouraged to be sensitive to the energy levels in meetings, taking stretch and bathroom breaks if needed, and playing short games to refresh people. We have held contests for fun, celebrated special achievements of individual members when they happen, and take care to appreciate the efforts and energies of one another”.*

*-Jennifer Wong, Coordinator for the Youth Council, City of Edmonton Youth Council, City of Edmonton*

# 10. Evaluate Progress

## Track your Success

Keeping track of Youth Council activities and progress is a key ingredient to its overall success. It's a way for people to learn and for the Council to flourish.

- Members can celebrate successes and figure out what to improve
- Positive outcomes can be used to build a case for new or ongoing funding
- Results can be communicated to people in the community to demonstrate successes, promote the Youth Council and foster relationships
- People outside of the community might also be interested in learning about the Youth Council; it can be an impetus for initiating a Youth Council in their own community or lead to enhancements in what they're currently doing (as evidenced in this Toolkit)

Evaluation is a form of research where information is compiled, organized and analyzed to look at the effect of activities. This is done to help make decisions about programs. It helps determine how well programs are working and identify reasons for success or failure. (Canadian Evaluation Society, 1989)

## How to Conduct an Evaluation...in a Nutshell

1. **Include youth members in the development of your evaluation.** The evaluation will be most relevant if the Youth Council members are involved in creating it, implementing it and analyzing results. This is called 'participatory evaluation'.
2. **Think about why you want to evaluate.** What information do you want to cull from the evaluation? For example:
  - Do you want to learn how **effective** the Council is in the community? (e.g. What changes are occurring because of what the Youth Council is doing?)
  - Do you want to know if the Youth Council is **representative**? (e.g. Are all youth demographics represented?).
  - Do you want to keep track of **success stories** or identify the **challenges** so you can come up with ways to improve?



3. **Develop your picture of success.** How will the Youth Council know when it has achieved success? What are some “indicators” of success? Possibilities include:
  - The Youth Council helped to build a skate park and people are using it
  - The Town Council acted on advice provided by the Youth Council
  - The Youth Council carried out a workshop on bullying and community members attended and learned from it
 Have members of the Youth Council brainstorm indicators of success. Make sure they are realistic and measurable.
  
4. **Determine methods for collecting information.** Some possible methods for tracking success include:
  - Creating a spreadsheet and keeping track of numbers of activities, participants, etc.
  - Conducting a survey after each activity or at the end of the year
  - Interviewing people involved with the Youth Council (members, adults, champions, partners, etc.)
  - Holding a ‘focus group’ with Youth Council members
  - Scheduling a large group discussion or community forum
  - Taking photographs to track progress
  - Making a video of activities and people’s opinions
  - Creating a “brag book” that includes photos, stories and memorabilia from activities of the Youth Council; keep track of dates, activities, people who attended and what happened as a result
  
5. **Develop tools for collecting information.** Develop a survey or come up with some interview questions. Pull together your brag book. If you go the survey route, make sure you defer to a peer or adult advisor with past experience in research to review and provide valuable feedback.
  
6. **Get that Info!** Be assertive and actually use the methods you decide on (#4, #5) to go after the information that can help enhance your Youth Council.
  
7. **What does it all mean?** Add up the numbers (if applicable) or look for trends in people’s written responses. Make note of any developing themes or comments of interest.
  
8. **Communicate Findings.** Write a report outlining the results. This can be a fun and interesting report – it doesn’t need to be boring! The brag book is one example of a fun way to communicate results. Get creative and innovative! Next, consider who should be on the receiving end of these results, why they should see them...and then make sure they see them!

9. **Act on Results.** The Youth Council should celebrate successes unveiled through evaluation and make decisions about how to act on any challenges or potential areas of improvement. After all, if you don't act on the evaluation....what was the point?!

Be sure to check out the Youth in Philanthropy Canada tools for evaluating youth advisory councils online at:

[www.yipcanada.org/resources\\_YIP\\_matters\\_tools\\_e.cfm](http://www.yipcanada.org/resources_YIP_matters_tools_e.cfm)

# TIPS for Rural

Youth in rural areas oftentimes face some unique challenges when working to form or sustain a Youth Council in their community, among them:

- Lack of transportation
- Limited space for meeting
- Council member turnover from older members leaving the rural area for school or work, and not returning

## Hitching a Ride

When members of a Youth Council are spread over a large geographical distance and little or no public transportation is available to them, getting to meetings can be difficult.

Here are some potential solutions:

- car pooling - taking turns asking parents or another trusted adult mentor to drive
- making Youth Council funds available to provide gas money to one or two drivers, or engage a mini-bus
- hold the meeting in conjunction with another event or in keeping with the locales where the majority of the members will already be (e.g. after school, before another program begins, etc)
- make use of conference calling and/or web-based technologies as a way to meet more frequently and consistently (The downside to “virtual” meetings is they can be impersonal. Alternating between in-person and virtual meetings may be a good solution!)

## Space to Meet

Some rural areas may not have the necessary “infrastructure” or buildings for potential meeting space.

If a Youth Council is without a designated meeting place, it just means the members will have to get creative!

This might be a perfect opportunity to research and implement virtual meetings, as mentioned in the previous step. Refer back in the Toolkit to the ‘step’ on forming partnerships in the community and think about with whom the Council might be able to partner for space. A church, a classroom, the library or a local business might be willing to donate their meeting space!

## Keep them...or Bring them Back?

A recent study entitled *Impacts of Youth Out-Migration* (Ricard et al., 2006) looked at why young people leave rural areas. Some of the reasons noted include:

- Lack of services
- Low wages
- Few full time employment opportunities
- Skills development not locally available

The study goes on to state it may not necessarily be a bad thing for young people to leave their rural areas and obtain training and experience not available in their small town. The key, however, rests in the ability to attract those same young people back to the community to live and work.

Here are some of the ways the study suggests rural communities can work to attract its youth back to their hometown:

**Family and community attachment.** The number one motive for young people to return home. Friends and family are key factors. Women and those between the ages of 25 and 39 are most likely to return for this reason.

**Employment.** Family business opportunities, new job openings, return to previous job posts. Returning to the familiar is a big draw for many youth, especially those who prefer small community living.

**Finances.** Post-secondary school is expensive! A lot of young people feel they have to move back in with their family after schooling simply because they cannot afford to live on their own.

**Relationships.** Some young people return to their home community because their partner lives there.

**Small Town Charm.** Some people prefer life in a small town versus a big city. Some have had negative experiences in cities while others simply enjoy the strong sense of community.

A rural Youth Council can keep these factors in mind - and use them to their advantage - when trying to retain and/or entice members back home.

Be sure to create lasting attachments with any former Youth Council members who may have already left the community. Use Facebook and other social networking tools to keep them updated on what is happening “back home”. Who knows, this strategy just might result in their return to the Youth Council!

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# About TORC - The Ontario Rural Council

## What is TORC?

The Ontario Rural Council (TORC) is a non-profit organization that brings together 50 member organizations and rural stakeholders in an effort to reflect the collective rural voice on issues and concerns affecting rural Ontario. TORC counts amongst its members non-profit organizations, private sector corporations, the public sector, and individuals with specialized expertise and resources in rural matters. Through scheduled forum events, a rural development conference and roundtable discussions, TORC calls upon these member representatives from all sectors (economic & infrastructure, resource & environmental, community & human services, and government) to offer up valued input that helps inform and influence rural policy, programs and research development. For more information visit: [www.torc.on.ca](http://www.torc.on.ca)

## What is the Rural Youth Working Group (RYWG)?

Operating under the auspices of The Ontario Rural Council (TORC), the Rural Youth Working Group (RYWG) is comprised of youth and non-youth stakeholders from across Ontario who share a specific interest in rural youth issues. They come together to champion youth engagement and act on subjects of interest to young people in rural Ontario.

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