

Involving Youth in the Coalition

Recruiting Youth

Successful coalitions develop a process to recruit youth as active members. The following are some strategies to aid in successful recruitment:

- Develop a recruitment plan and process that will help find the right youth.
- Search broadly. Coalitions can recruit through other youth-serving groups, schools, leadership classes, student councils and service groups at school. Check with teachers, counselors and school leaders to find candidates who will qualify for the positions or projects.
- Utilize existing networks. Recruit through both youth and adult networks.
- Personally invite youth. Coalition members can use their own relationships to recruit youth participation.
- Let youth know how they will benefit. The opportunity will be good on a resume'; they will meet interesting people; they can learn and experience new and exciting things.
- Have a job description of what is expected of the youth.
- Use a short application form and an interview.
- Ask lonely or shy teens who are looking for an invitation.
- Use youth from any background who want to prevent Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA).

Selecting and Interviewing Youth

When recruiting a youth the following can be used to create an interview or short application:

- Explain the coalition you are representing and your interest in promoting healthy, safe, fun and productive lifestyles in the community.
- Tell the youth why he/she was selected (leadership qualities, creativity potential etc.) and who recommended them.
- Discuss the mission and the vision of the coalition.
- Describe your interest in having young people assume leadership roles, plan projects, activities that they may find interesting.
- Ask if involvement would be of interest to them and what questions or concerns they may have.
- Offer instructions on what the youth may need to get involved in the group.
- Explain the kinds of adult support (training, meetings, food) that will be available.
- Ask parents if their child can be involved in the coalition.
- Ask for specific commitments from the youth (attend monthly coalition meeting).
- Ask for contact information such as address, phone number and email.
- If they are not interested, ask them if they know who else may be interested.

Allen, S. (1997). Teen power: A guide to involving youth in your drug free alliance. Madison, WI: Alliance for a Drug Free Wisconsin. Property of Alliance for Wisconsin Youth, Department of Health Services, Bureau of Treatment, Prevention and Recovery.

Maintaining and Sustaining Youth Involvement

After recruiting and selecting youth, use the following strategies for ideas on how to maintain and sustain youth involvement:

- Assign an adult supporter to that youth. Create a job description for the adult supporter.
- Be mindful of logistical details that can be challenging such as: providing transportation; plan meeting times that fit into the youth's schedule; building "ice breakers" and "getting to know you" activities plus more interactive content into meetings; providing food and other incentives such as certificates, field trips, t-shirts and gift certificates.
- Create a youth friendly atmosphere. Help youth understand the coalition's group process. Create ground rules, know their names, listen to what they have to say and check with them frequently to gauge feelings and level of understanding.
 - One common challenge is *Inadequate support and time*. It takes time and resources to support high-end youth engagement.
- Encourage and acknowledge good attendance at meetings.
 - One common challenge is *Youth transiency*. Many youth participants move frequently due to economic and family circumstances, graduation from school and changing responsibilities make it difficult to maintain connections.
- Take time to discuss differences between children and adults.
 - One common challenge is *mismatched expectations*. Adults may want youth to lead and take responsibility when youth haven't developed the requisite skills. Or, adults may have expectations that are too low.
- Hold an orientation session for new youth members.
- Be aware of legal issues. Youth may not be signatories to checking accounts or contracts in many states. Transporting youth to/from meetings and events is another issue that involves many liability issues.
- Involve more than one youth to increase their comfort level and willingness to speak out.
- Involve youth in all decisions not just youth related ones.
 - One common challenge is *Adults forcing adolescents to "do it our way"*. Leadership is not something we do *to* teenagers. Rather the attitude should be "together we can do it for ourselves". Leadership is about refining how adolescents make choices in their lives.
- Encourage youth to prepare for meetings.

Paul, A., & Lefkowitz, B. (2006). *Engaging youth: A how-to guide for creating opportunities for young people to participate, lead and succeed*. REACH, Sierra Health Foundation program. Retrieved August 12, 2008 from http://www.sierrahealth.org/assets/files/reach/Engaging_Youth_Report.pdf