

## Recommendations for Dane County Youth Governance Program: Program Year 2018-2019

During the spring and summer of 2017, Dane County UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development staff gathered data and carried out program evaluation to inform operations of the Dane County Youth Governance Program (YGP). These efforts have culminated in several recommendations regarding YGP operations, as well as plans for an annual recommendations process, moving forward.

The following input was used to formulate the recommendations below:

- Data gathered from the Dane County YGP program from 2012-2017
- Data gathered from UWEX youth governance programs in other Wisconsin counties
- Survey responses from YGP youth participants (2012-2017) collected in August 2017
- Survey responses from Dane County Board Supervisors collected in August 2017
- Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles (research-based best practices for youth leadership work)

4-H Youth Development staff plan to continue with yearly YGP program evaluation, and present future recommendations on an annual basis in August/September.

### **Recommendation #1: Change youth eligibility from youth in grades 9-12 to youth in grades 10-12.**

- Eligibility starts in grades 10 or 11 for most UWEX youth governance programs in other counties.
- Only six freshmen have been YGP members (out of 81 total members); only 18 freshmen have applied (out of 144 total applicants). With increased outreach in recent years, there have been ample strong YGP applicants even with freshmen removed.
- With a few exceptions, most freshmen don't yet have the maturity and experience needed - it can be misleading and disheartening to market it to freshmen when there's a low likelihood of acceptance.
- Survey responses were evenly spread between allowing or restricting freshmen eligibility.
- Youth survey response: "[T]he more thought-provoking and analytical-based assignments in high school better prepare students for committee meetings. I think it would be a more enriching experience when they can reflect on government issues more thoughtfully."

### **Recommendation #2: Implement a more rigorous application process for youth seeking a second term.**

- Most/all UWEX youth governance programs allow youth to reapply for second terms (or more).
- Sixteen YGP youth have served second terms over five years (between two to four each year).
- YGP youth seeking a second term should go through the same full application process as new applicants (this is the process used in Racine & Kenosha counties).
  - The second term application and interview questions will be different and will reference applicants' first term engagement.
  - Applicants' mentors will be asked to fill out their second term reference form.
- Motivated and engaged YGP youth will be the most likely to pursue a rigorous second term application process.
- Second term YGP youth will be expected to take on a leadership component.
- Youth survey response: "If I had served a second term, I would have felt much more comfortable in my understanding of the procedures and information, which would have led me to asking more questions/participating."
- Supervisor survey response: "It takes two years for a County Supervisor to learn, so why expect a student to be quicker? The second year, they learn a lot."

**Recommendation #3: Keep attendance expectation at 75% of regular meetings.**

- UWEX youth governance program attendance expectations range between 50-80%, and meeting frequency ranges from once to twice a month.
- All youth respondents felt that 75% was either somewhat, very, or totally realistic/feasible. Supervisors' responses were spread evenly from not at all to totally realistic/feasible. Youth mentioned that participants must fulfill their commitments. Averaging youth responses about what the requirement should be yielded an expectation of 72% attendance.
- In the YGP application & outreach, provide all meeting information details in advance, and use stronger language to require youth to commit to the attendance expectation (or refrain from applying if they're unable to commit to it).
- Continue to develop and implement ideas for promoting youth engagement (see #4).
- Support YGP youth who may experience barriers or obstacles during their YGP term, which may affect their attendance.

**Recommendation #4: Expand committee assignments for YGP youth to include non-standing committees that engage citizen input and address topics relevant to youth. Each YGP youth serves on just one committee (as they do now).**

- Youth committee assignments in other counties include both standing and non-standing committees.
- Several supervisors and staff have expressed interest in having youth input on specific non-standing committees (including Food Policy Council, Homeless Issues, Extension Committee, and others).
- Benefits of having youth serve on certain specified non-standing committees may include:
  - Youth could provide more input before decisions become finalized at higher levels.
  - The content may be less technical, more accessible, and more interesting for youth.
  - Youth may be less intimidated on committees that include other community members, and more comfortable engaging.
  - Increased youth engagement can help with youth motivation and attendance.
- Supervisor survey response: "Frequently, routine items of business move quickly, which doesn't always give youth time for questions or engagement."
- Youth survey responses about barriers to committee engagement:
  - "The fast flow of conversation makes jumping in harder... I honestly believed there was often nothing I could contribute that would help, and so when the committee was busy on important issues, it seemed selfish to jump in just to gain knowledge so I could understand the issue."
  - "Sometimes the issues are so complex that I have no idea what they're talking about, so I'm too intimidated to speak."

**Recommendation #5: Reclassify the YGP Youth Executive Committee as a workgroup to more accurately reflect the purpose of this group.**

- Dissolve the YGP Youth Executive Committee and reclassify it as a workgroup (it's currently a subcommittee of the Dane County Youth Commission). This action requires Dane County Youth Commission and Board Chair approval, as per Corporation Counsel MacKenzie.
- The YGP youth will continue to meet as an educational group that is specifically for YGP members, and is not relevant to the general public.
- If there would be a future reason to reinstate this as a subcommittee, this can be done from the original resolution.