



Tips and Tricks to Starting a Young Adult Council Part 2: The Do's and Don'ts of Young Adult Councils

Tip Sheet 15

Transitions ACR

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Young Adult Advisory Councils are groups of likeminded young adults who come together on a consistent basis to share resources and advise organizations on how to better serve and support young people.

Young adult councils can be used to provide feedback to a variety of organizations, including but not limited to:

- » research
- » statewide mental health services
- » individual mental health service agencies

This tip sheet, which is based on direct experiences from young adult council members across the United States, provides a list of Do's and Don'ts for your organization to consider when developing and running a young adult council.



1. Young adult members should do most of the talking.

Don't

Assume that young adults cannot run their own meeting

Do

Create the space for a 100% young adult led meeting

Young adults often have little to no opportunities to use their voices and mental health expertise to create system change. Having young adults set the agenda, facilitate the meeting, and speak openly and honestly creates a positive, young adult led space. While some members may need training and support to develop facilitation/advocacy skills, providing members autonomy to lead meetings helps make the council more authentic for everyone involved.



2. Young adult members should set the rules/parameters for the level of involvement and role of any older adults that attend meetings.

Don't

Have more older adults in the room than young adult members

Do

Provide a space for older adults to attend meetings as "silent supporters"

Older adults can be deemed "silent supporters," meaning their role is to support young adult members ONLY if asked of them, and otherwise, they sit back and let young adults run the show. Bringing in more providers/supporters than the young adults themselves is a sure way to lose your young adult members or make them feel uncomfortable speaking up.



3. You should value member's time as they can give it and set a flexible attendance policy.

Don't

Develop unreasonable attendance policies for members

Do

Provide a flexible attendance policy

Ask for a reasonable time commitment such as 6 months, with attendance at 4/6 meetings. Council meetings should be run so that each meeting provides an opportunity to welcome new members and orient them to the purpose and mission of the council. Strict attendance policies are insensitive to young adults' many competing priorities (e.g. work, school, relationships, and mental health recovery). Extensive commitments (e.g. 1 year or more) may deter participation.



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4. Young adults may need time to become comfortable attending the council meetings before they are willing to talk about themselves.

Don't

Pressure young adults into providing feedback or disclosing their own mental health

Do

Provide training and guidance for new members to flex strategic sharing skills

It is very important to make them aware that they are never required to share their lived experience if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Additionally, having introductory calls or training meetings with new members of the council may be helpful to educate them on how to share their story in a strategic way that can advocate for change while still protecting their own experiences. Make sure that all members know that the meetings are safe spaces and nothing a member shares is shared outside of that space. More experienced members can be encouraged to mentor newer members and model how to translate lived experience into effective feedback.

5. It is important to recognize the unique expertise young adults bring to the table.

Don't

Forget to show the members the value of their expertise

Do

Provide compensation for expertise

Showcasing the work of the council is a great way to boost morale of the members and remind them that their feedback matters. Another way to recognize the expertise members bring to the table is by compensating them. If you can't provide direct payment, consider alternate compensation: transportation stipends, snacks, professional development assistance (e.g. training on how to share recovery story).



Resources

- Mizrahi, R. & Duperoy, T. (2018). *Tips and tricks to starting a young adult council* [Video webinar and PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/webinars>
- Costa, A. & Duperoy, T. (2016). *Nothing about us without us: growing meaningful young adult involvement in your organization* [Video webinar and PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/webinars>

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