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Establishing your own youth advisory committee

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to establishing a youth advisory committee. However, outlined below are common steps to take to establish a youth advisory committee based on Parachute's experiences establishing the Canadian Youth Road Safety Council and literature on youth advisory committees.

Establish youth partnership as an organizational priority:

Getting organizational buy-in is an important first step to creating a culture where meaningful youth partnership is prioritized and championed. This also ensures that the required resources including funding, staffing and engagement tools are allocated toward establishing a YAC. Buy-in can be fostered by letting staff know about what meaningful youth partnership looks like, its benefits as well as its importance.

Ensure representative youth membership at the table:

The YAC should be representative of the target population and should be considered as a test group before engaging a wider audience. Collecting demographic information and ensuring an accessible recruitment process is the first step to accomplishing this. It is often underserved youth who are left out of engagement and partnership processes. Rather than just putting a general call for applicants to join the YAC on social and digital media, putting in effort to build relationships with community organizations that serve underserved youth, schools and other places where youth work and play can ensure diversity in the YAC.

Work with members to create the spaces, opportunities and processes to meaningfully engage them:

This looks like enabling safer spaces where youth can practise new skills and have a support system in place. Policies, procedures and guidelines should be co-developed with youth to ensure that youth are involved in a way that is inclusive. Using youth-friendly communication, being clear about opportunities, expectations and deadlines, as well as providing a variety of options for participation, are other ways this can be done.

Provide supports and resources to ensure participation from all members:

Youth have multiple priorities, differing abilities, differing experiences and differing levels of comfort in participating. Organizations should recognize this and ensure there are multiple, accessible ways that youth can be engaged. Some examples include providing live translation, creating bilingual materials and allowing youth to provide feedback verbally or through writing.

Establish systems to value youth input and their experiences:

Organizations provide compensation in many different forms to acknowledge the value that youth provide. Examples of compensation include payment, honoraria, gift cards, providing reference letters for jobs and school and professional development opportunities. Transparency with respect to how youth input is being used can be a motivator for youth to be engaged and contribute their ideas. The feedback loop can inform YAC members of how and why their input was used or not used in the organization's projects and initiatives. The feedback loop can provide youth with a look of the impact of their input and how they have co-created change within their community.

Co-evaluate what works and doesn't work:

Use surveys and focus groups to regularly collect feedback on what works, what doesn't work and ideas for improvement for the YAC from members. Having YAC members co-develop the evaluation tools to collect feedback can lead to a smoother and more relevant process for soliciting feedback.

Develop a plan for sustainability:

This can look like continuing to build buy-in from the organization and partners, providing youth with information on how they can stay involved, continually learning about the needs of youth in the context of road safety and allocating funding for continued participation of the YAC. Integrating YAC members into internal and stakeholder meetings outside of the YAC can also be a strategy to sustain youth partnership beyond the short term.