

Promoting Young adults Leadership on State Advisory Groups

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING COMMON BARRIERS

The [Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018](#) (JJRA) promotes the inclusion of young adults and people with personal juvenile justice experience in State Advisory Groups (SAGs). Specifically, at least 20% of SAG members must be appointed under the age of 28 and at least three members must have direct juvenile justice involvement or be the parent or guardian of a young adults with juvenile justice involvement.¹ This requirement has proven to be challenging for many; however, this requirement remains an important part of ensuring that the provisions of the JJRA are driven through a citizen-government partnership that includes the voices of those the JJRA aims to serve.

As part of the 2020 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) State Relations and Assistance Division's National Training Conference, this resource was developed by a group of young adults members and adult allies to provide potential solutions to common barriers to engaging young adults members in SAGs. Each SAG is unique as are its challenges, so the suggestions below should be considered in the context of your state or territory.

Core Concepts to Promoting Young adults Leadership on SAGs

Youth-Adult Partnership:² In youth-adult partnerships, young adults and professionals plan, learn, and work together, with both partners sharing equally in the decision-making process. These partnerships do not follow a model where adults take the leadership roles and young adults are assigned to inferior roles, or activities where adults make all the decisions and young adults only provide input or review. Rather, this is a partnership built on the strengths of both the young adults and the adults, which makes the final product stronger.

Research studies indicate that successful young adults-adult partnerships require a variety of elements, including the following:

- Young adults and adults participate equally in the decision-making process.
- Roles for young adults and adults are authentic and meaningful.
- Young adults and adults learn together and serve as resources for one another.
- Each group is treated with respect and dignity by the other group.

¹ Juvenile Justice Reform Act (2018), Section 223(3) (iii-iv).

² University of California 4-H Young adults Development Program. (n.d.). Young adults-adult partnerships. <http://4h.ucanr.edu/About/Framework/YAP/>

- Adults and young adults work together to determine roles, plan activities, set deadlines, create guidelines, and divide tasks.
- If voting is used for decision making, young adults and adults' votes count equally.
- Everyone feels comfortable enough to ask questions and express their ideas.
- Meetings are held during non-school hours and they start and end on time.
- Adults may offer to drive young adults to meetings.
- Both young adults and adults are encouraged to contribute their unique strengths to the partnership.

Recruitment and Retention Are Continuous: Adolescence and emerging adulthood is a time of transition and high mobility as young adults move from school to adulthood and/or move through the juvenile justice system. This means SAGs are likely to experience a higher turnover rate among young adult members. In addition, given the need for SAGs and Designated State Agencies (DSAs) to remain connected to those experiencing the juvenile justice system, recruitment efforts should never stop. SAG members and DSA staff should be on the lookout for young adults with an interest in joining their SAG and connect them with the young adults committee, current young adults SAG members, or specific SAG activities to gauge their interest. It is also important to note that current young adult members are juggling many priorities (e.g., school, work, community involvement, probation or program expectations, parenting, etc.). To keep current young adult members engaged in SAG meetings, SAG involvement should be easy and meaningful. Current members who feel valued are the best ambassadors for new young adult members.

Lighten the Environment: SAG meetings are often procedural and include people with a great deal of power, particularly in the eyes of young adults with juvenile justice experience. To make sure that SAG meetings are welcoming to new members, current members should make the meetings less formal, orient young adults leaders to the group, break down any lingo and explain initiatives or policies, and underscore how the perspectives of young adults members matter.

Young adults Are More Than Their Past or Their Age: By joining a SAG, young adult leaders have illustrated a desire to be community leaders. Welcoming them and treating them as full SAG members conveys their value and provides the greatest opportunity for their growth and for the growth of SAG's work. Do not ask only for their opinion or contribution as a young adult, someone on probation, or a formerly incarcerated person. Rather, give young adults members the same opportunities, respect, and privileges afforded to all SAG members.

Intentional Opportunities to Lead: Young adults engagement benefits the whole group as well as the young person. Ensure that clear ways exist for young adult members to speak up and contribute. These opportunities may include joining a committee, becoming a part of SAG leadership, or serving as an

ambassador to other young people, in addition to opportunities that are unique to your state or territory. Communicate these opportunities to young adult members early and often.

Solutions to Common Barriers

Challenge	Strategies to Overcome Challenge
How are we finding young adult members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get recommendations from SAG members. • Go to them and let people see their work. • Identify existing young adult engagement groups in your state or territory. • Partner with existing young adults-serving and/or young adults leadership organizations. • Encourage SAG members to bring young adults and young adults they serve in their personal or professional roles to SAG meetings to “test it out”. • Avoid “young adults” and “professional” member categories or roles. Illustrate young adult members’ value as full members, beyond their age and/or system involvement. Treat them the same as all members, use similar orientation methods, and offer equal participation in meetings and SAG activities. This can help to identify the multiple ways that their experience, passion, and knowledge make them a good match for the SAG.
How do you provide a stipend and invest in young adult members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Title II funds to pay honorariums. • Talk about the importance of their membership and tasks on job applications or résumés. • Find ways to partner with workforce development, your DSA, partner organizations, and SAG members’ organizations to promote career pathways (e.g., internships, entry-level positions, job training, etc.).
How do we make this work meaningful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure young adults are engaged in meaningful work and that their contributions are used to shape more effective approaches. • Give them clear role in meetings and the work of the SAG. • Make space on all committees and work groups and in SAG work for young adult leaders, beyond young adults committee membership. This helps ensure that young adults members work on things they are passionate about.
How do we combat systemic structural barriers to bringing young adults to the table (such as governor appointment)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put young adults in active leadership roles. • Educate the governor’s office on the young adult voice requirement of the JJRA and the benefit of having emerging young leaders involved in the SAG and JJRA work. • Make young adults committees an action arm of the SAG through which all juvenile justice work is evaluated. • Have staff allies and young adult leaders develop plans to prevent tokenism, adultism, or exploitation.
How do we recruit young adults with system involvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to where young adults are. Visit young adult groups or programs and encourage members to get involved. • Use on-site focus groups at group homes, shelters, detention centers, and other relevant institutions to recruit young adult members
What can we do to avoid labeling young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know each young adult as an entire person, beyond their label as a “system-involved young adults.”

Challenge	Strategies to Overcome Challenge
adults by their system involvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of the power of labeling young adults by their past experiences. Appreciate and honor who they are now. • Help young adults build the skills and strategies to own their story and decide how they want it to be shared. • Find ways for young adults in out-of-home placements to come to meetings in their own clothes, rather than state-issued clothes.
We appoint young adult members, but then they don't show up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to find out what is preventing them from attending SAG meetings and figure out how you or other SAG members can remove barriers to their attending. • Demystify meetings and make the group less intimidating by incorporating relationship building or networking activities into meetings. You can also visit with young adult members before each meeting to explain agenda topics and think through where the young adults may want to speak. Provide young adults members with a meaningful role at meetings. • Challenge a current member to serve as a mentor to young adult members.
Our young adult members are so quiet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a synopsis or overview of the agenda prior to the meeting. This can be provided in writing, by phone, in the car on the way to a meeting, or in a conversation before the meeting. • Give members time at meetings to share or present, such as report-outs or planning of site visits. • Ask! Ask for their opinion. Know their passions and involve them on those subjects. • Send a text when an acronym or a bit of lingo is used because asking what the acronym or lingo means may be uncomfortable for young adult members. • Include introductions as part of meetings. Icebreakers can make meetings less formal and more comfortable for young adult members. • Spend time outside of meetings with young adult members to build relationships and increase their comfort with SAG work. • The more valued and informed young adults are, the more they will engage.
Members can never attend at our normal meeting times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a young adults committee meeting the night before the full SAG meeting to gather their perspectives on the agenda. • Hold meetings in the late afternoon or evening. • Examine policies on meeting virtually in your state. If possible or if needed, explore using the lessons learned from temporary virtual allowances (due to COVID-19) in the long



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