

NEW YOUTH BOARD MEMBER CHECKLIST

Youth can use this checklist to assess their abilities to provide meaningful representation on a board. This tool can help everyone involved comprehend the necessary adjustments and to measure their commitment to youth board membership. It is important to note that we are not implying that every board, or youth, must meet all of these criteria.

- Am I aware of my job description and what the board expects of me?
- Am I aware of the roles this board plays?
- Has the board communicated the specific objectives they have for me as a youth member?
- Have I identified or been assigned a mentor for my role on the board?
- Do I have the abilities, and knowledge necessary to make ongoing contributions to the board?
- Do I work to know individual board members outside of board meetings?
- Am I aware of the written and unwritten agenda and flow of the board's meetings?
- Am I willing to learn through open and positive conversations about my performance?
- Am I aware of the needs, public positions, and opinions of the youth I represent?
- Do I have the abilities and knowledge to correspond about my governance activities with my community and the group(s) I represent?
- Do I have the abilities, and knowledge to take leadership roles on committees and/or the board?
- Am I willing to reflect on what I want to get out of this experience and am willing to share it with the rest of the board?
- Am I willing to ask questions that give me a better understanding of board activities?
- When receiving feedback, information, and answers to questions, do I recognize the expertise and experience of the adults on my board?

- Am I willing to give my time and attention to all board issues rather than just the ones that affect me and those I represent?
- Do the adult members of the board hold any stereotypes about young people?
- Do I hold any stereotypes about adult board members?
- Have the adult board members received training that allows them to consider their assumptions about “kids these days?”
- Does the board show its appreciation for the good work that I am doing and have done?
- Am I mentoring other potential youth representatives who may replace me?



FOR YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

Local decision making is based upon civility, personal relationships, and respect. Once the adults on the board reach out to the youth, it is up to us (the youth) to reach back – and we must really stretch in order to make the connection. Here are a few things for us to consider when being selected to a board:

1. **Have confidence in yourself.** By whatever means, you have been selected, appointed, or voted onto the board; you belong there. It will take a few months to get comfortable in your position. In the meantime, just listen, watch, ask questions, and learn.
2. **Find a guide or mentor.** There is an old saying that you can't be a guide unless you are on the journey. Thus, find a guide, coach, or mentor with whom you feel comfortable. This should be someone who has experience with the board and who is willing to learn alongside you.
3. **Be a leader.** You are now in a leadership role – use this role to advance the fact that youth are capable, intelligent, and mature. People are watching you, and you are now seen as an example of all youth. This does not mean that you have to be nervous, or change your whole personality. It does mean that you will be held to a higher standard than some of the youth who are not at the table.
4. **Stay interested and curious.** The issues that a board faces are not always very interesting – to anyone. However, the work of a board is to do all the work it is responsible for, and it is up to you to take responsibility for your learning and contributions. If you look bored, the adults will have a difficult time taking you seriously.
5. **Show up.** If you want the board to invest in you, take the time to invest in the organization and board. Attend all meetings; confirm the dates, times, and locations. Mark them in your calendar.
6. **Use the power you have.** Speak up, if you feel like you have some ideas about how to improve the flow of the meeting, the dialogue between members, or the agenda topics. If you use politeness and do not offend members, they will listen to you. It is also important to know that you are one of many people; don't expect the board to do everything you say. To be treated like an equal means that your ideas are considered to be as valuable as all the others, not more so.

7. **Do something.** Of course you are busy. School, extracurricular activities, work, family obligations, other service commitments – your schedule is packed. However, if you want to be a leader, you will have to take on some projects and deliver on what you promise. Get on a working subcommittee, take on a project, or do some in-depth investigating of an issue or two. The bottom line is that you gain respect by making contributions through action.
8. **Ask questions.** If you have a question, it is likely that someone else has a similar one. Becoming a decision maker is complex. Leaders who are learning ask questions. Asking questions sets a positive tone. So, feel free to ask questions. If you have so many questions that they would actually slow down the meeting to a crawl, jot your questions on a note pad and get your answers during any breaks. The board members will expect you to learn the lingo – so make certain that you are learning as you go. Study their language, use their language – and soon it will become second nature for you, too.
9. **Think about what you want to get out of the experience.** This could be the development of public speaking or leadership skills or a reference for college or additional trainings. Board membership should benefit you individually just as much as it benefits the board. Make sure to communicate your individual wants and needs prior to starting your service, to ensure that they are on the boards radar and are possible for them to help you accomplish.

Ladder of Youth representation on boards

Adapted from “Benefits of Youth Partnerships” by the Seven Circles Coalition Youth Adult Partnerships Project in Sitka, Alaska, from Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation.

Youth-adult, shared decisions

This is the goal. The board is comfortable with the competence and ideas of the youth representative and grants them full voting rights. The entire board works together, equally implementing youth or adult ideas.

Youth-initiated ideas, shared decisions with adults

This board is progressing and allowing the youth to develop ideas.

Adult-initiated, shared ideas with youth

The board then acts upon such ideas, but still sees them as the “youth thing,” which is different from the “adult thing.” And although the adults provide assistance, guidance, and support – they remain the “kid’s thing.”

Consulted and informed, assigned but informed

The youth has a role on the board and is kept informed on all the issues. But the youth is treated as a “kid,” and not a member. During this “consultant” phase, at least one board member asks the youth for his/her opinion. On this rung, adults propose ideas and the youth provides reactions, revisions, and refinements.

Tokenism

The board wants youth representation and puts the youth in the spotlight a great deal, but does not have the time, skills, or culture to allow the youth to be an active participant in the decision-making process. This is when youth are given a role or responsibility, but they have little power, either because they are outnumbered, or the roles they have been given have very little influence.

Decoration

While your board feels the need to have youth representation, it does not have any desire to get anything more than insignificant input from the youth, who is not allowed to have a meaningful role.

Rubber-stamping

The base level, where your board simply wants to be a part of the youth representation movement. This occurs when the board’s image will benefit by having youth representation, but the youth is only there to “rubber stamp” the actions of the board.





RESOURCES

Alaska resources

Association of Alaska School Boards

Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) supports youth skill development through our yearly Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) and Youth Advocacy Institute (YAI) conferences. Additionally, Alaska ICE staff put on workshops that help students build team building, project planning, data analysis, board membership, leadership and advocacy skills.

<https://ice.aasb.org>

Resiliency, Youth Development Program

Division of Behavioral Health

3601 C Street, Suite 934

Anchorage, Alaska 99524

(907) 269-3425

<http://www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Pages/adolescent/Positive.aspx>

Spirit of Youth

Spirit of Youth is dedicated to creating, promoting and recognizing youth involvement in communities across Alaska.

www.Spiritofyouth.org

The Resource Basket

The Resource Basket supports those who support rural Alaska Native youth through trainings, one on one coaching, or through providing appropriate resources.

www.Resourcebasket.org

National resources

National Center for Nonprofit Boards

Dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening their boards of directors.

<http://www.ncnb.org>

The Free Child Institute

The Free child Institute teaches youth and adults to work together and transform the world in positive, powerful ways.

<https://freechild.org>

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development

Provides resources and training to organizations and communities to increase youth-adult partnerships in creating a just and equitable society.

<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>

Community Partnerships With Youth, Inc

Offers a training curriculum and provides training to young people about their role as trustees or as partners in the governance process.

<http://www.cpyinc.org>

Youth on Board

Provides consultation and publications to help involve young people in decision making.

<http://www.youthonboard.org>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hans Bernard

After graduating from Chugiak High School in 2001, Hans moved to Salem, Oregon to pursue a bachelor's degree in political science from Willamette University.

While at Willamette, Hans began his career working in the state capitol for then Senate Majority Leader, now Oregon Governor Kate Brown. Hans continued his career in the office of Governor Ted Kulongoski and served as a senior policy advisor on transportation and deputy legislative director. Hans also spent time working at a communications firm in Portland, where he designed and executed numerous public affairs campaigns.

Since 2013, Hans has served as an assistant vice president in the office of government relations at the University of Oregon. His portfolio includes coordinating efforts to secure increased operating and capital funding for public universities. When Hans began at the UO, he was reminded of how small the world can be, discovering that the chair of the alumni association was Carol Comeau, retired Anchorage superintendent.

Hans attributes his career and interest in politics and civic engagement to his time serving as the student on the Anchorage School Board in the late 1990's.

In his free time, Hans enjoys exploring the outdoors in Oregon—especially in the summer months—being an uncle to his niece and nephew, cooking, and traveling.

Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE)

A part of the [Association of Alaska School Boards](#) (AASB), the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) is committed to the success of all students in Alaska. By collaborating with school districts, school boards, and communities, ICE is able to strengthen partnerships that lead to more positive environments and outcomes for youth.

Reach out to Alaska ICE if you need additional tips or support related to youth engagement and support on school boards. We can provide troubleshooting tips, activities to assess your board readiness for youth engagement, trainings for boards, school staff and students. For more information on the trainings and resources available through Alaska ICE visit <https://ice.aasb.org> or call 907-463-1660.