Best Practices

Youth on City Environmental Commissions

This document has been prepared by youth serving on several different city environmental commissions in Minnesota in April 2019.

* **Please email your additional ideas, tips & recommendations** to Jason Rodney at Climate Generation jason@climategen.org Sean Gosiewski at RCC sean@rccmn.co
* **Student Environmental Commission Leaders are now supporting one** another in their work through regular zoom calls via their Youth Leader Peer Learning Network – <http://rccmn.co/youth-leader-network/> Interested Student Environmental Commissioners can get involved by emailing Jason jason@climategen.org

## Equal voting status

* Youth on commissions need to feel like their voices matter and their views are as important as those of the adults on the commission. Giving youth members equal voting status makes sure youth know that they are not just there as observers, but rather as equal contributors. Letting youth know that their voices are valued can also increase engagement.
* There are several cities where youth have voting status and some where they do not. This is a comment from a student on a commission where youth do not have a vote: “Students main role is as a second opinion. We mainly serve to offer the youth opinion on different policies.”

## Multiple youth commissioners

* Entering a commission as the only young person can be intimidating, and can result in the commissioner feeling unable to easily express their thoughts. Having multiple youth seats on a commission empowers those commissioners by making sure they have someone similar in perspective to work with. It also provides opportunities for the commission to be more representative of the population of young people in a city, given it can vary widely.
* *And here’s a key insight from one student commissioner - multiple doesn’t have to mean just two!*
	+ It is very important to not only have support among your fellow adult commissioners but also to have support with your fellow student commissioners. I went from a commission with 5 student members to 3 student members between the Parks and Conservation commissions. The need for a connected group of student commissioners is as vital as connecting with adult commissioners.

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## Meeting times that are accessible to students (evenings)

* Youth can have different schedules than adults, and we need to remember to consider these. For example, youth cannot meet during the school day, and often not during the late afternoon due to cocurricular activities. Evenings on weekdays are usually the best times to hold commission meetings that are accessible to youth.

## Youth seats on multiple commissions

* A young person’s perspective and ideas are necessary and valuable not only on environmental and sustainability issues, but in all aspects of city functioning. Youth seats on multiple commissions in a city sends a message that young people are not less-than, and are actually an invaluable part of city operations and government.

## Making sure youth commissioners feel qualified

* Again, entering an adult-led commission as a young person is intimidating, and one of the best ways to not only let youth know they are welcome, but to give them a chance to contribute and learn, is to ask if they would be willing to take on a task or help an adult member with one. Being specifically reached out to by adult members helps make a youth member overcome barriers to participation, like feeling too inexperienced to contribute anything, and is a great way to help youth get engaged, especially when they first start on their commission.

## Projects that are accessible to youth leadership.

* Aspects of city operations that commissions advise on can be highly complex and technical, even for adults. Youth are already in positions where they may feel out-of-place, and, even though they are often perfectly capable of participating and advising on such projects, they can shy away from these projects initially without the proper support. Commissions should look to identify, frame, and even take on specific projects that are accessible for youth participation and leadership.

## Program Examples:

(begining of list - more to be added in future versions of this doc)

* Northfield
	+ There is a formal program between the city and school district
	+ Northfield has a youth council and youth on almost every city commission, and all these youth get together once a month to learn about city issues, share ideas, and receive support.