

# Engaging Youth in Federal Policymaking

## Lessons from State and Local Youth Councils

October 2009



All youth ready for college, work & life.

Young people are disproportionately involved in and affected by the problems that beset communities and states. This is cause for concern, but is also cause for engagement. Young people are the source of innovative solutions. And studies show that young people want to be engaged as agents of change.

A growing number of Governors, State Legislatures, Mayors, City Councils and County Commissions across the country have successfully engaged young people in the policy process through **Youth Councils: officially sanctioned groups of young people with a diverse range of life experiences who directly advise policymakers on the array of policies and programs that directly impact youth in their state and community.**

In some cases, **Youth Councils** provide advice on proposed and pending legislation, state budget expenditures and funding for youth programs. Some have the duty of drafting and proposing legislation. Whatever their structure, **Youth Councils** give young people a meaningful role in the policy and decision-making process on the issues that impact them the most.

**America's Youth Councils Network** is made up of more than twenty-five **Youth Councils** from around the country, including:

- **statewide** Youth Councils that advise legislatures and/or governors,
- **county-level** Youth Councils that advise commissioners,
- **city-level** Youth Councils that advise mayors and city councils,
- and select **issue-based** Youth Councils, such as foster youth advisory councils, seeking to broaden their scope.

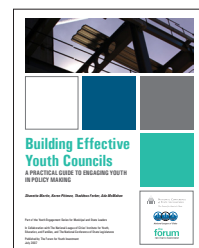
**America's Youth Councils Network** is supported by the **Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> National Partnership**, an unprecedented coalition of prominent national organizations whose members connect with more than 100 million children and youth across the country. Created in 2008, the partnership offers leaders tools and supports to change the way they do business together, so that more young people are ready for college, work and life. The Forum for Youth Investment is the founder and managing partner of **Ready by 21** and takes primary responsibility for the development and coordination of **America's Youth Councils Network**.

## For More Information on Youth Councils

See *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making* (Forum for Youth Investment, 2007). <http://forumfyi.org/node/127>.

*"If you had a problem in the Black community, and you brought in a group of White people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there'd probably be a public outcry. It would be the same for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us."*

**Jason, 17 years old**



# America's Youth Councils Network

America's Youth Councils Network encourages Members of Congress to take action to support Youth Councils through the following actions:

- **Create a Federal Youth Council With Authentic Engagement**

The federal government guides the nation's policy on a plethora of issues that directly impact young people. These issues include, but are not limited to: health care, education, nutrition, foster care, homelessness and juvenile justice. Genuine representation of youth voice in the policymaking process is crucial to assuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs that serve young people. A Federal Youth Council would provide policymakers at the executive and legislative levels targeted guidance and direction for policy change. A Federal Youth Council can be created through legislation and should be modeled after successful State and Local Youth Councils. America's Youth Councils Network is interested in working with Members of Congress to develop such legislation.

- **Provide Federal Grants for State and Local Youth Councils**

State and Local Youth Councils are supported by a variety of funding streams, including nonprofit intermediaries and direct funding from the state or locality they represent. Unfortunately, some are operating without funding; others are losing the state and local funding due to budget cuts. This leads to inexperienced and overly burdened staff, a lack of diversity of membership and less than desirable conditions for effective youth engagement. America's Youth Councils Network is interested in working with Members of Congress to develop a federal incentive grant program to support State and Local Youth Councils.

- **Use State/Local Youth Councils As a Sounding Board**

As you work on policy issues related to young people as a federal lawmaker, existing Youth Councils would love the opportunity to present their views and perspectives. We encourage you to reach out to your state or district's Youth Council to get feedback on youth issues and inform your policy choices.

## Contact

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