

A **NEW DEAL** FOR **YOUTH**

HOW TO PUT YOUTH IN POWER

A HILL OFFICE'S GUIDE TO YOUTH-LED LEGISLATION

By ND4Y Changemakers

“You can always tell the type of person who’s drafting your legislation just from the way they’re writing it.

You can tell when something is written by a younger person who has perspective and things to say in that field versus an older person who’s just doing it just to do it.”

- REBECCA DO

PUTTING YOUTH IN POWER

*“Go to young people as the originators of ideas. Equip young people to understand and weigh in on policy but also work with them as creators of policy” - **Smitha Gundavajhala***

YOUTH-LED LEGISLATION

Young people are the ones designing legislation. Young people:

- Originate ideas
- Are equal partners to Hill Offices
- Have agency
- Are at the head of the table
- Determine how the information they provide is disseminated
- Are the top decision-making body

VS

YOUTH-CENTERED LEGISLATION

- Treats young people as subjects to be observed
- Takes information from young people without giving them the opportunity to participate in the process
- Pertains to youth but doesn't allow youth to lead the way

KEY DIFFERENCES

The key difference between being youth-led and being youth-centered is the power dynamic:

- Are you engaging young people as partners or as objects?
- Are youth the head of the project or the face of the project?
- Are youth setting the vision or are you asking youth to confine their ideas based on your vision?

“You’re doing what you think is best for us, but if you haven’t asked or implemented us, then how do you know?” - Anthony Dickey



BENEFITS OF BEING YOUTH-LED

*“It’s important to be youth-led because systems that keep young people at arms length while inviting them to participate lose out on the valuable wisdom that young people have in their own experiences.” - **Smitha Gundavajhala***

- ✓ Allowing young people to discover themselves, take leadership roles, feel secure speaking up, and lead the conversation.
- ✓ Gaining the wisdom of young people and an understanding of how they are experiencing systems today.
- ✓ Youth hold themselves accountable when they make up what they’re agreeing to
- ✓ Youth can more easily connect with other youth
- ✓ Youth voice won’t be forgotten
- ✓ Legislation that is NOT youth-led often fails youth by overlooking important aspects of their experience
- ✓ The bill will work for young people!

*“If you have a bunch of youth coming into your office because your old bill doesn’t work, that means something.” - **Fabian Sanchez Mondejar***

KEY STRATEGIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:



Build Trust

- Be honest and transparent: Tell us the practical limits on how you plan to use the information we share
- Follow Up: Focus on building non-transactional sustained relationships.
 - After meeting with a young person, reach back out to schedule a meeting and share next steps.
 - During the meeting, take notes, ask questions, don't make promises you can't keep.
 - *"Go into meetings with a positive attitude, show that you're excited to hear what the young person has to say. Even seeing a little nod can be super helpful!"* - Elina Salikhova
- Follow Through:
 - *"They want my two cents, but after giving my two cents, they don't follow through or they don't care. Why did they ask for my opinion in the first place?"* - Fabian Sanchez Mondejar

KEY STRATEGIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:



Provide Education and Resources

- *"Youth have the ability to do amazing things and we are doing amazing things, but we need the resources and education to teach us to speak in the policy language and apply it." - Anthony Dickey*



Ask Good Questions

- *"Youth are often asked questions that don't really target our interests." - Elina Salikhova*
- Good questions allow for our personality to come through. It's an opportunity to share our opinion and know that our opinion will be respected
- Be open-minded to our answers
- Ask us what we care about, what's important to us, and what's missing in the conversation.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:



Treat Youth as Experts (because we are!)

- Don't leave young people off to the side or give the impression that our ideas don't matter
- Don't have low expectations of our knowledge and abilities
- *"Young people are more capable and more engaged in politics than what people think."* – Rebecca Do



Connect with Youth from Different Backgrounds



Don't Create Arbitrary Barriers to Participation

- Young people shouldn't have to speak in policy language or put up with adultism to participate



Don't Tokenize

- Involve more than 1-2 young people and don't treat their voice as representative of the entire youth experience
- Involving young people without properly informing them is tokenization

CHECKLIST FOR A YOUTH-LED PROCESS:

- ✓ Youth have a seat at the main table, are at the head of the table, and there's young people from different backgrounds at the table
- ✓ Youth are stakeholders in the broader policy process rather than just in issues seen as "youth issues."
- ✓ Youth have real decision-making power
- ✓ Youth are the originators of ideas
- ✓ Youth are engaged at every stage of the process
- ✓ There's a clear plan in place to act on the ideas that young people provide
- ✓ If something isn't possible due to external factors, that's shared with young people and new approaches are collectively brainstormed.
- ✓ Youth are given the resources and education they need to fully participate.
- ✓ Youth set the vision, goals, and outcomes.

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