



# YOUTH ON BOARDS

## WHY YOUTH LEADERS MATTER



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Exploring Youth Representation on  
Your Board or Committee

Whether school board, Native Corporation, non-profit or faith organizations, Alaskans are increasing their commitment to working with youth. When youth representation is intentional and supported, Alaskan boards can deeply benefit from youth member's points of view, creative thinking, direct questions and open-mindedness. Fully engaged youth leaders are essential to building positive school climate, learning about youth concerns, and making good decisions as a school board.

Alaskan youth are seeking opportunities to weigh in on decision-making in their communities and schools. When supported, youth board members are not only building leadership skills, but are also learning citizenship and gaining life experiences that they need to be successful adults.

Of course young people cannot be simply “plunked” onto a board and be expected to perform. Like any member they need training and mentoring to be a productive board member.

This booklet, was originally created by an Alaskan student who wanted establish effective intergenerational boards. The ideas and experiences contained in this booklet have been collected from youth who serve or have served on intergenerational boards throughout Alaska.

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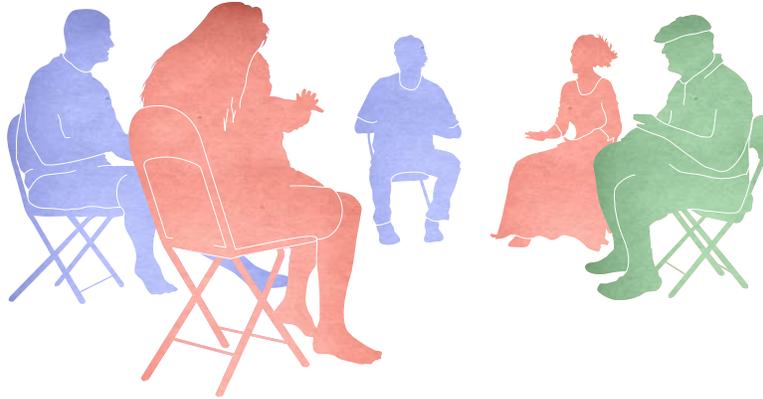
# WHY HAVE YOUTH ON YOUR BOARD?

Adults who work with youth on boards gain insights about youth, broaden their own perspectives, and can contribute more effectively to youth success.

Youth representation often increases the relevance, energy and deepens perspectives, and in turn — programs and services are improved as a result.

A youth presence can often result in an increased commitment to the board and a stronger sense of connection to the community. Often board members are more aware of their responsibility to model ideal board behaviors and processes, which can help boards run more smoothly but also help youth feel supported as members.





# PREPARING YOUR BOARD FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

## Assessing your readiness

Boards tend to work effectively with youth if, prior to including youth members, board members are willing to:

Be flexible with meeting times and locations in order to accommodate school schedules.

Adjust their culture from doing things to and for youth, to working with youth.

Relax their expectations about efficiency while new members are becoming comfortable with the culture of the board and the use of Robert's Rules of Order.

Make some adjustments to the way the board supports its members (such as paying young people in advance for their expenses, providing snacks at meetings, and/or explaining the young person's role to parents/guardians). Have clear conversations regarding adjustments board member should make to help youth members feel comfortable at meetings. AASB can help support this type of conversation through planning and facilitation.

Inform your board in advance of who your new members are and when they will begin attending meetings.

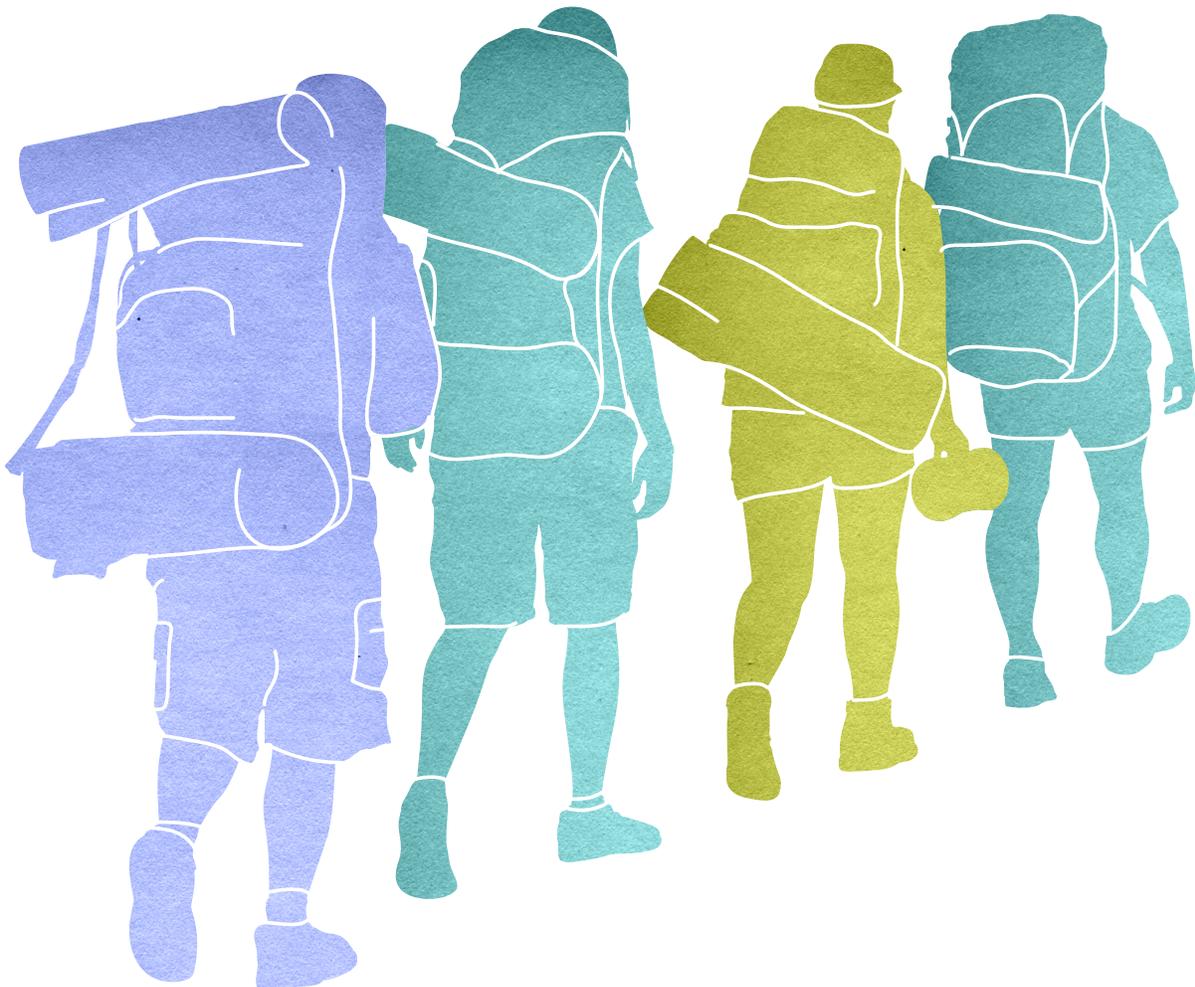
Have a plan for orienting the youth board member to the board, which can include having an "Adult Board Mentor".

Hold meetings at times that are convenient for new members. Take into consideration factors such as school or after-school activities. Occasionally, these times will not be convenient for other board members, so try and reach a compromise.

## Assessing your readiness: Is your board ready for involving youth?

The checklist that begins on the next page can be used to help give direction, uncover hidden issues, clarify tasks and provide next steps for getting your board ready for a youth member. Use this as a tool and have multiple people fill it out, including board members, staff and young people previously involved.

(Adapted from “14 Points” by Youth on Board.) Adults can use this checklist to assess your board’s ability to have meaningful youth representation. This tool can help everyone involved comprehend the necessary adjustments and to measure their commitment to these changes. It is important to note that we are not implying that every board must meet all of these criteria.



# YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE CHECKLIST

## Decision Making

- We have identified the ways young people can be involved in our decision-making process.
- We know which decisions we want young people to be involved in.
- We have considered how will make decisions so they are empowering to young people on our board

## Knowing Why

- We know how youth involvement can benefit youth, adults, and our organization
- We have a clear vision, goals, and objectives for youth involvement on our board.

## Assess Your Board

- We know how to build support for youth involvement with our board
- Everyone (board members, staff members, administrators) on our board is committed to successful youth involvement.
- Our board has the time and resources to make a commitment to effective youth engagement.

## Organizational Barriers

- There are permanent board policies that support youth involvement in decision-making.
- My board has addressed budget and staff issues related to youth involvement.
- Terms of office and voting rights are equal for young people and adults
- We as a board are willing to adjust our culture to make meetings more friendly to youth.

### **Personal Barriers**

- On our board, young people involved in all issues, not just those that affect their age group.
- Board members have examined their own stereotypes about young people.
- Young people are engaged as decision-makers throughout the organization.

### **Legal Issues**

- My board is aware of the legal responsibilities of involving youth as decision-makers.
- We know our state laws regarding youth involvement in decision-making.

### **Recruiting**

- We have a set recruitment criteria for new youth members (eg. Motivation, diversity, competence, past experiences)
- Our decision-making activities attract diverse groups of young people.
- Our recruitment process educates others about the importance of youth involvement in decision-making.

### **Orientation Process**

- We have an an orientation process for young decision-makers.
- A board member has explained youth involvement to parents.
- We have a process for helping young people understand the roles they will serve.

### **Develop Young Leaders**

- We have a peer training system for young decision-makers.
- We provide opportunities for young people to develop their decision-making skills.
- We support adult allies to youth leaders.

### **Trainings for Adults**

- There is training process for adults supporting youth involvement.
- Our trainings meet the needs of youth and adults.
- Our board culture embraces diverse training interests, needs, and approaches.

### **Meeting Facilitation**

- We use techniques that engage youth and adults throughout our meetings.
- There are opportunities for all members to speak at our meetings.
- Young people have access to the resources needed to participate in board meetings.

### **Purposeful Youth/Adult Partnerships**

- We provide opportunities for youth and adults to build relationships.
- We involve parents in the support of youth decision makers.



# PREPARING YOUR BOARD FOR YOUTH MEMBERS

Once your board has decided it is willing to make adjustments and accommodations for youth representatives, some of the following actions would be appropriate for your board to take:

- Provide some materials, including research, explaining why involving youth is important (e.g. *Helping Kids to Succeed*, learn leadership and life skills, improve decision making, and improve their school climates; and increasing community-wide youth engagement in service activities, etc.).
- Propose the idea of having younger members on your board. Remember: people often fear change, so be persistent and let the other members become comfortable with the idea.
- Have a vision for what the board could achieve through youth representation – and share that vision with your board members.
- Help youth assess their own skills and abilities and motivations for joining your board. The checklist below can help youth understand their strengths, as well as areas where they need additional support for effective engagement. Have youth share information on their needs, and set up specific times to check in on how the board is doing in meeting those needs.
- Provide positive examples of youth action/activities already existent in your community.
- Set meetings at times that will be convenient for youth.
- Personally invite youth to attend the meetings as guests.
- Stay positive and resolute. Boards are often comprised of the busiest men and women in a community. Understand that any change in the culture of the board will cause some discomfort for certain members. The youth will be more readily welcomed if no other drastic changes occur.
- Reduce the use of acronyms or provide all members with a card of commonly used terms and acronyms.

- Reach out to other boards that have youth members. Seek to learn from their experiences.
- Set a clear role for the youth board member, including time to speak at each board meeting (such as a student activity report at a school board meeting).

## Board best practices for sustained and thriving youth involvement (from principles of youth voice)

- **Respect:** A culture of respect provides all participants with opportunities to speak and learn from each other. This is particularly important for youth to see and understand, and builds up comfort for asking questions, making mistakes or asking for changes to meet their needs as board members.
- **Positive communication:** Youth are best heard when adults step back and listen to understand. Honest, positive and on-going communication is needed for youth to come forward and explain their perspectives and ideas for board direction and decisions.
- **Investment:** Young people need access to ongoing information, training and support to be successful as full board members. Youth must be able to develop their own skills and practice them often to have the confidence to act and speak up in adult situations. Investing in young people on your board takes time and resources, but the results are worth it for the entire board.
- **Meaningful involvement:** Youth roles and board responsibilities should be an integral part of the way the board functions. Developing meaningful engagement means that the recruitment, roles, training and preparation of young people are well thought out and supported across all activities and processes of the board. An assessment of how ready your board is for the meaningful engagement of youth is often necessary to know where you are starting from and what gaps to address.



## CREATING YOUTH POSITIONS

Once your board has agreed to have youth representation, a few logistics must be resolved. Of course, each individual board will take its culture into account when determining the extent of the youth's role and involvement. Here are some things to consider:

- If your board is a publicly elected board, for legal reasons you will need to limit your youth representation to an advisory capacity. If this is the case, ensure that youth input is obtained and listened to (i.e., provide a mechanism for youth advisory votes, which will take place before the other members vote).
- If your board is not governed by state or federal statute, and is in control of its own bylaws, you can most likely invite youth to have many of the same “member privileges” as the adults on the board.
- When creating youth positions you may need to adjust your bylaws, board structure, and policies to accommodate the newly created position.
- Consider having a minimum of two youth board members. This will avoid tokenism, increase diversity of opinion and make it easier for youth to participate.

When deciding how the youth member(s) will be chosen, it is a good idea to consider the following questions:

- Is it legally allowable to have youth members chosen in the same way as adult members? (If this is possible, it is probably best to be consistent in the way all members are selected.)
- Will the youth be representing a constituency? If so, should that group select your new member?
- If you are a voting board, is it necessary to select two youth members in order to have an odd number of members for voting?

## CONSIDERING LEGAL ISSUES

Looking at the issues and topics that your board deals with will help you determine many things, including the extent of youth involvement and where you should look for new members.

- If your board deals with liability issues, confidentiality, conflict-of-interest hearings, employee contracts, and/or student discipline issues, it is a good idea for your board to have a conversation with a lawyer to determine the appropriate level of youth involvement in these sensitive matters. In many cases, the youth representative is excused from attending these portions of the meetings or hearings.

## RECRUITING AND CHOOSING YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES/MEMBERS

It is one thing to create the opportunity for youth representation on your board; it is quite another to find youth with the talent, time, and inclination to join your board. It is best to do a broad-based search and identify several candidates who could best serve your board. Following an interview process, you can select the appropriate candidate.

Make a list of youth whom you personally know through work, church, school, and/or other neighborhood organizations. Invite each member of your board to do the same.

Consider asking the heads of youth-serving organizations to compile a list of recommended youth. (Examples of such organizations include: recreation centers, cultural centers, faith communities, sports leagues, and youth courts.) Ask the school counselors, administrators, teachers, club sponsors, coaches, and PTA members for their list of recommendations, too.

Create an application and ask questions that pertain to your board's issues. Be careful not to make the application a barrier to recruitment. Understand that this will probably be the first application of this kind completed by the youth.

Designate a contact person within your organization. This will help your board evaluate applicants and will allow consistency when dealing with the youth.

Make sure the process is open enough to attract a diverse group of qualified candidates. An easy way to ensure this is working with multiple schools from different areas of your community.

Create a description of the roles, responsibilities, key commitments and timing so youth can make an informed decision if this is something that matches their interests, schedules, etc.

Promote the benefits of involvement: it is a learning opportunity and a way to contribute to the community; it involves "real world" experience; and most importantly, it's an opportunity for youth to voice their generation's concerns.

### Selecting qualified applicants:

If you want to choose the most-qualified members, your selection process should not "weed" out candidates; it should bring out the best in them. To ensure the best results, you will have to get to know each applicant.

- Conduct interviews with applicants. Schedule these interviews at youth friendly times and locations.
- Ask for references. A conversation with a parent, teacher, or religious leader can help you evaluate the traits and qualifications of each candidate.
- Search for evidence of the positive contributions each applicant would make. Search for diversity, as well as candidates who possess a desire to advocate, and have a confident voice.

# DETERMINING RESPONSIBILITIES

Too many times boards go searching for “that perfect match” rather than finding an “engaging youth” and working to assimilate him or her into the board’s culture. After selecting the youth, have a discussion with your board about the responsibilities of your new member(s). Consider this a continually evolving list: as the youth gains confidence and competence, the board will need to consider some adjustments.

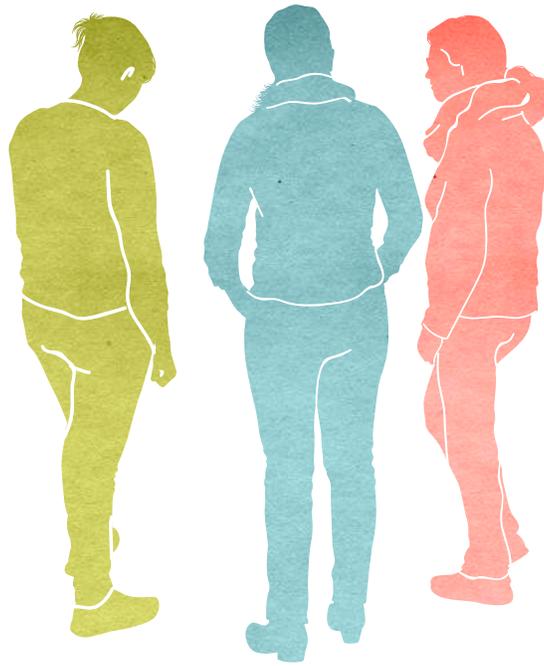
Some possibilities for youth member responsibilities include:

- Placing a member report at the beginning of each meeting. This will allow your youth members to share their involvement in board projects and report back from any other groups or subcommittees they may be a part of.
- Nominating youth to serve as co-chairs of your board and/or as members of your smaller subcommittees.
- Assigning youth to meaningful, necessary tasks, such as minute-taking or contacting other organizations on the board’s behalf.
- Having youth speak at events on behalf of the organization. They can be present and speak up when funding organizations come for on-site meetings and reviews.



# EDUCATING YOUTH MEMBERS

- Familiarize new board members with your services and issues by giving them your web site and putting them on your listserv or mailing lists.
- Prepare brief talking points about your services for youth members so they can advocate for the organization.
- Have an elected official or other board member give new members a tour of your facilities.
- Provide all new board members with the history of the board, including previous issues, past actions taken, and other useful information. The more your new members know, the more they will be effective and thoughtful partners on your board.
- When you give your new member any necessary information, include a copy of the minutes from the previous meeting. This will acquaint them with the flow of your meetings and the intricacies of Robert's Rules of Order, if you use them.
- Provide your new members with a copy of the agenda and any needed materials before your next meeting. This way, they can review the information and come prepared.
- Be patient. The new member's learning curve will probably be vertical.
- Make certain your new members know members of the board on a personal level. This simple action will make youth members feel much more comfortable and connected to the board.
- Have an open dialog about appropriate meeting attire. Will the new members dress up, or will the board choose to move in a more casual direction?
- Identify a board member who is willing to act as a mentor. Ideally, this will be a person in a position of leadership (to add credibility). This will also enable them to advocate on the behalf of youth members.
- This "mentor" should meet with new/youth members before their first meeting, to go over issues such as appropriate dress, issues on the board's agenda, etc.



## MENTORING YOUTH MEMBERS

Research has identified the following best practices for adults mentoring youth. The Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (MENTOR, 2009) provides the following six standards to help mentoring adults incorporate best practices into their day-to-day interactions with youth:

- Recruit an appropriate mentor by realistically describe the role they will play as a mentor to youth board members. Explain the importance of the role, and ask what supports they will need from the rest of the board.
- Screen prospective mentors to determine whether they have the time, commitment, and personal qualities needed to be an effective mentor.
- Train prospective mentors in the basic knowledge and skills needed to build an effective mentoring relationship.
- Match mentors and youth to increase the odds that mentoring relationships will endure. This can take into account the type of support youth need, and the types of skills potential mentors have.
- Monitor mentoring relationship milestones and support mentors with ongoing advice, problem-solving support, and training opportunities for the duration of the relationship.
- Facilitate bringing the match to closure in a way that affirms the contributions of both the mentor and mentee and offers both individuals the opportunity to assess the experience.

# LOGISTICS OF SUPPORTING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Provide transportation to and from your meetings for your new members. A car ride, or bus, cab, and airfare, should be provided, if needed.

Call the parent(s)/guardian of your new member(s) to compliment them on their child's perceptions. Answer any questions the parents may have. This is an excellent time to build an important link to the new member's home. Provide the parents with all necessary information, including the names and phone numbers of your organization's leaders. Make sure that when you hang up the phone, everyone involved feels supported and validated.

A representative from your board should contact the new member's school and workplace to inform them of the youth's selection to your board – and any absences that will occur as a result. These telephone calls are an excellent opportunity to ask people to congratulate youth on their selection.



# 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](http://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](http://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.



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