

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia

Prepared by

Truclusion

City of Olympia Youth Council Research & Recommendations

“One thing I find to be especially intriguing about the idea of the youth council is that it can help inspire others in the community. My hope is that no matter what the youth council does, it helps to create a better community and encourages others to help as well.”

- an Olympia youth

September 2023
Olympia, Washington

Prepared by:

Truclusion

Yien Folino
Dr. Ashley Gardner
Dane Wolfrom
Dr. Tiffany Monique Quash
Lorena Najarro
Marvin Jones
Rachel Wallis

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	5
Recommendations	9
Recommendations in Practice	20
Ordinance Recommendations to Stand Up a Youth Council	20
Procedural Recommendations for Youth Council Operations	25
Recommended Next Steps	27
Results of National and Local Research	28
Successful and Sustainable Youth Councils	29
Youth Council Purposes & Responsibilities	33
Youth Council Structure	38
Youth Council Membership	40
Youth Council Meetings	44
Youth Council Member Terms	48
Roles of Youth Council Members	50
Youth Council Application & Selection Process	54
Adult Youth Council Advisors / Liaisons	56
Research Methodology	61
Youth Councils across the United States	61
Olympia Area Youth	64
References	67

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Olympia is exploring the creation of a platform for youth to engage their local government and be a part of decisions made that affect them in the short term and long term. In December 2022, the City contracted Truclusion to research successful youth council models and best practices across the country, engage Olympia youth to inform recommended models, and provide recommendations to the Olympia City Council on the structure and implementation for a future youth council in Olympia. The City requested recommendations for thirteen specific items: youth council structures and duties; age range for participants; youth representation from different schools in the area; number of members; length of term; member recruitment; meeting youth where they are at; creative meeting formats; scope and work plan; long term youth council sustainability; coordinating with partners; compensation; and staffing needs.

Truclusion implemented a multi-faceted work plan, that concurrently engaged local Olympia youth and conducted research of youth councils across the United States. The first step was forming a group of local Olympia youth to participate in defining what will constitute a successful youth council in Olympia, so that the national research could be relevant to Olympia. Truclusion initiated a recruitment process that employed social media, flyers posted throughout Olympia, and engaged twenty-seven local youth-serving organizations, middle schools, high schools, and colleges. A total of 44 youth were selected to participate as “Olympia Youth Council Advisors.” Those 44 youth represented sixteen different geographical sections of Olympia, twelve different schools, eleven unique races, a variety of living conditions, and a plethora of extracurricular activities. (Detailed demographics of Advisors can be found on pages 66-67.)

The ideation processes and results from Olympia Youth Council Advisors are summarized beginning on page 7. The virtual and in-person sessions were run by two youth who volunteered. The youths collectively identified seven measures of what a successful youth council would be to them: *A council that...*

- ✓ *contributes real change in the community*
- ✓ *collaborates and hosts events for youth*
- ✓ *empowers, elevates, and hears the voices of Olympia youth*
- ✓ *sustains from year to year, with initiatives continuing*
- ✓ *is supported by the community*
- ✓ *has protocols ensuring welcome, open, and respectful discussions*
- ✓ *represents the diverse community within Olympia*

Having local youths’ standards of success, Truclusion was able to conduct a mixed methods research study of youth councils across the country. 74 youth councils across 23 states were identified. 290 documents, including webpages, subpages, application forms, bylaws, and handbooks from those youth councils were analyzed to extract relevant data regarding how youth councils are constructed, organized, designed, and implemented.

The 74 youth councils were invited to complete questionnaires. Youth council liaisons and youth council members received separate questionnaires. The liaisons’ survey gathered data regarding the ways youth councils are structured, organized, and maintained, including structural questions on youth council membership, positions, committees, processes, sustainability,

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

meetings, and overall impact. The youth council member survey captured youth council members' first-hand experiences, satisfaction levels, participative outcomes, and best practices from the youths' perspective.

After national research concluded, the Olympia Youth Council Advisors met to provide informed recommendations for a youth council in Olympia, using research findings and their own experiences and perspectives. Collaborative processes supported by Truclusion gathered local youth perspectives, enabled group discussions, and culminated in twenty-three recommendations being agreed upon by the Olympia Youth Council Advisors. Results of the national research and the Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommendations are reported in *Results of National and Local Research*, beginning on page 29. Each section is separated into three subsections:

- **Standard Practices** are the most common practices found across the United States
- **Best Practices** are recommendations from current youth council members and liaisons
- **Local Youth Recommendations** are the product of the Olympia Youth Council Advisors

After the research concluded and standard practices, best practices, and local youth recommendations were compiled, Truclusion used the research and Truclusion's experience empowering youth to prepare recommendations for the City. Most of the recommendations reflect both the informed desires of Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard/best practices across the country. In cases where recommendations depart from the Olympia Youth Council Advisors, explanations behind the deviation are included. Below are the final 23 recommendations. Detailed explanations for each recommendation with reference to supportive research begins on page 9.

Recommendations specifically requested by the City of Olympia

1. Youth council structures and duties –

Name: *Olympia Youth Council*

Housed: *Housed under City Government similar to City Council committees*

Funding: *Funded from City General Fund, with access to grants, donations, other sources*

Approach: *Youth-Centered, meaning youth identify the priorities, approaches, and solutions in which the youth council engages*

Duties: *Community Service; Civic Engagement; Connect Youth with Other Youth, Resources, and Opportunities; and Advise City Council on youth matters in the community*

2. Age range for youth participants – 14 to 20 years old

3. Youth representation from different schools in the area – Include student status and school attended as part of the nominating process that considers and prioritizes diversity

4. Number of members – Twenty (20)

5. Length of term – Youth Council terms shall be one-year in length, and a limit of four terms

6. Member recruitment – Short-term: *heavy outreach through schools, local organizations, and social media*; Long-term: *social media, marketing in schools, host youth-centered events*

7. How to meet youth where they are at –

- Inclusive meeting times and modalities (complete list on page 12)
- Provide current City expense defrayment stipends to youth council members

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

8. **Creative meeting formats** – Each youth council cohort will set meeting locations and formats
9. **Scope and work plan** – A detailed description of scope and work plan is located on page 13
10. **Long term sustainability** – Provide community engagement, youth empowerment, clear structure, effective marketing, equitable appointments, and ethical youth-centered leadership
11. **Coordinating with partners (i.e. school board, nonprofits)** – Youth council has authority to partner, within budget, with community entities and organizations
12. **Compensation, Stipends, and/or school credit** – No compensation; service hours allowed
13. **Staffing needs** – A detailed list of responsibilities and hours is on pages 14-15

Recommendations requested by Olympia Youth Council Advisors

14. **Possible types of impact an Olympia youth council can achieve** –
 - Secure more resources allocated to opportunities for Olympia youth
 - Develop a greater sense of community amongst Olympia’s youth
 - Create more opportunities to be outside and in the city
 - Foster greater opportunities for youth to volunteer, apprentice, intern, and get jobs
 - Help clean the community’s environment
 - Host town halls to address problems like STDs and drug epidemics
 - Design and implement a mural or sponsor other community art
 - Impact policy on issues such as education, health, environment, and social justice
 - Establish and fund a youth scholarship
15. **Best community representation** – Establish a nomination process that ensures the youth council represents all of Olympia youth

Additional Recommendations from Truclusion

16. **Appointment Process** – A detailed appointment process recommendation begins on page 16
17. **Number of leadership positions** – Seven (7)
18. **Onboarding** – 3 x two-hour sessions each June for upcoming new members and leadership
19. **Residency** – The majority of Youth Council members shall reside within City limits
20. **Eligibility** – Immediate family members of City Councilmembers or the Executive Team shall not be eligible for appointment to the Youth Council
21. **Vacancies** – regular members: next appointment cycle; leadership: by youth council vote
22. **Recommended budget expense lines** – Detailed budget expense lines located on page 18
23. **Ensure provision of viable youth engagement tool(s)** – Guidance for plan creation with collaboration and guidance from City staff

Following the detailed recommendations section that begins on page 9, are three templates that transform the recommendations into adoptable language for the City to use in establishing a youth council: (1) ordinance components for a youth council, (2) initial youth council procedures, and (3) next steps for teeing up a successful launch of a reflective, thriving, and sustainable youth council. These document templates begin on page 20.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

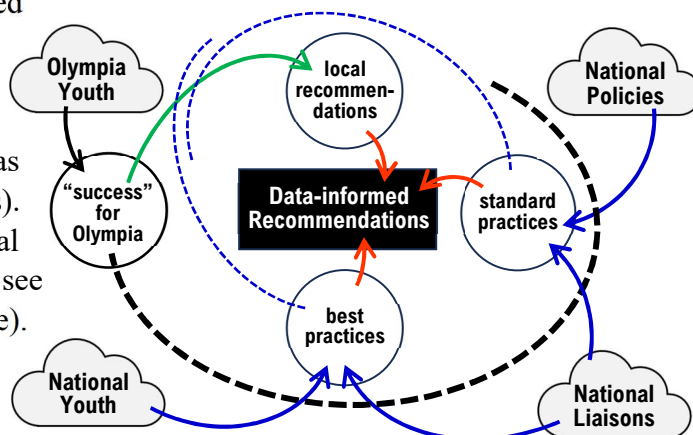
INTRODUCTION

The City of Olympia is exploring the creation of a platform for youth to engage their local government and be a part of the important decisions being made now that affect them in the short term and long term. In December 2022, the City contracted Truclusion to research successful youth council models and best practices from across the United States. During that contracting process, the City stated...

Early civic engagement is mutually beneficial to young people and to the communities they live in. In particular, participation in government is especially important for youth with diverse identities who traditionally have not had a seat at the table in government settings. Youth civic engagement is foundational to establishing sustained involvement in the democratic process. The intent of a City of Olympia Youth Council will be to foster collaboration between young people and the governing bodies that serve them in various decision-making processes. The City wants young people to take a more active role in decisions regarding programs and policies impacting them. A Youth Council can assist City policymakers in ensuring they are considering fresh perspectives and ideas for addressing the long-term needs of community members.

The City contracted Truclusion to research successful youth council models and best practices, engaging and consulting with local Olympia youth to inform recommended models, and providing recommendations to the Olympia City Council on the structure and implementation of an Olympia Youth Council. The City specifically requested recommendation on: youth council structures and duties; age range for youth participants; youth representation from different schools in the area; number of members; length of term; member recruitment; how to meet youth where they are at; creative meeting formats; scope and work plan; long term youth council sustainability; coordinating with partners; compensation; and staffing needs.

Truclusion implemented a five-phased human-centered approach to reaching data-informed recommendations. **Phase I** was identifying local and national respondents for the study. In **Phase II**, local Olympia youth defined what “success” means for a local youth council (solid black line), and then that definition was used to inform research questions (dotted black line). **Phase III** was conducting national research (blue lines). **Phase IV** was presenting results of national research to Olympia youth (dotted blue) and see what their recommendations are (green line). Final recommendations from national research and local youth were formed in **Phase V** (orange lines).

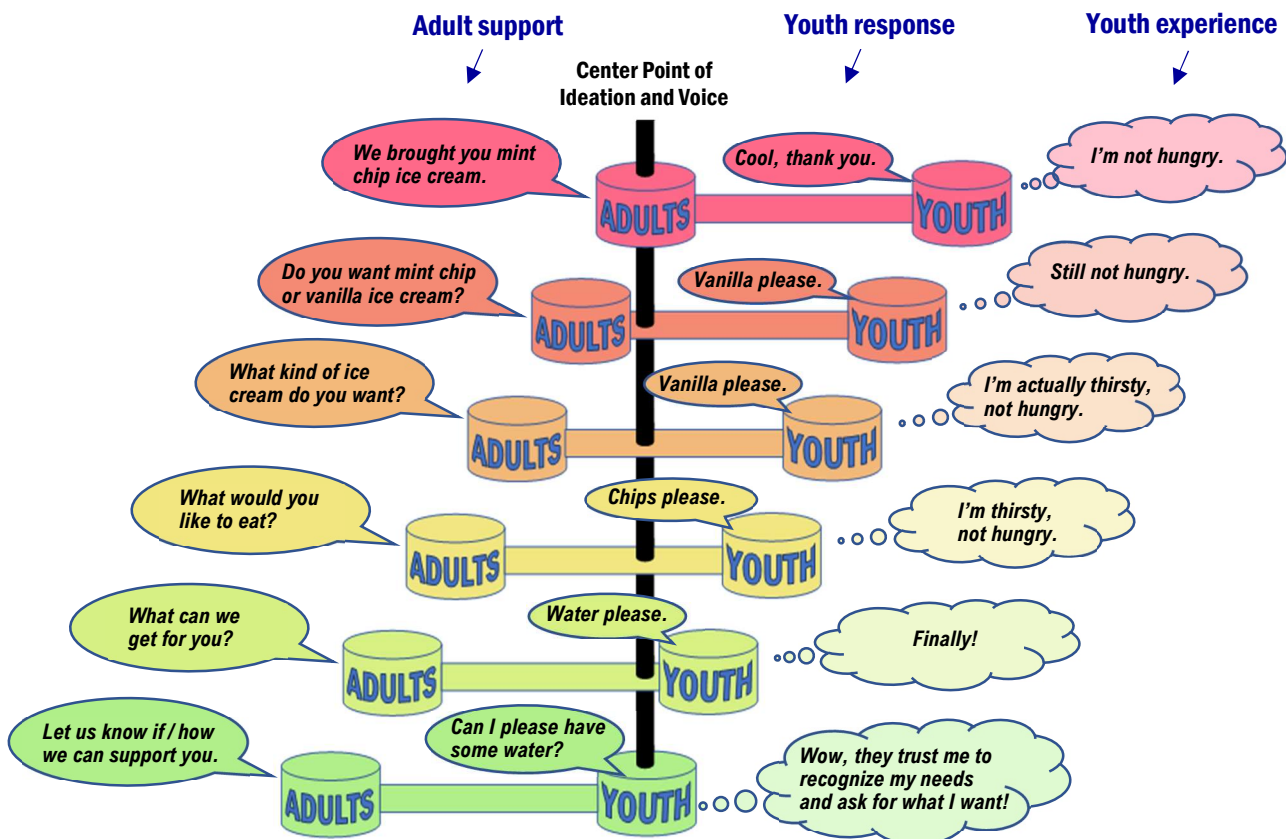


Paramount to being genuine in seating youth at a proverbial ‘table’ where they actively participate in decisions regarding programs and policies that impact them, is ensuring that they help design the ‘table’ themselves. Otherwise, it is too easy for “collaboration” between youth and government bodies to unilaterally serve the governing bodies, with adults setting how

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

collaboration, active role, voice, assistance, and other benchmarks of potential empowerment are defined and what they look like. It is natural occurrence for adults to unconsciously preselect options attractive to themselves, ask youth to choose between those options, and then praise themselves for including youth in the decision. It is not hard to image that all the decision options provided to youth under such an adult-shaped relationship may often be unpalatable for youth. However, if youth have previously been excluded from participating in City governance, they will likely accept a subordinated seat at the table with hope that one day they will be able to make an impact for their group. However, the research herein suggests that a youth council structured in such a subordinated way will not only misrepresent the perspectives, desires, and needs of youth, but will also struggle to sustain itself as a council.

Consider the below diagram of where the ideation and voice are centered based on an adult’s innate perspective of supporting youth. On the one hand, when adults make assumptions about what youth want (red colors), the feedback received by the adults can appear positive, and yet the needs of youth may be completely missed. On the other hand, when adults empower the youth to ideate (green colors), their needs can be met. The diagram only reflects the centering of ideation and voice. Centering power depends on other factors, such as decision-making ability and access to resources.



The approach Truclusion took to ensure Olympia youth help design their own future youth council included engaging a group of 44 local youths as Olympia Youth Council Advisors to complete two pieces of work. The first piece of work was defining what Olympia Youth Council Advisors’ definition of “success” would mean for an Olympia youth council, and what questions

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

they need answered from other youth councils across the country to shape a future youth council in Olympia. The second piece of work occurred after Truclusion conducted research of youth councils across the country. The Olympia Youth Council Advisors reconvened to codify their vision and list of recommendations for a future youth council in Olympia. The results of this work are included in *Results of National and Local Research* (beginning on page 29) under the *Local Youth Recommendations* subsections. Further information about Olympia Youth Council Advisors selection and methodology is detailed in the *Research Methodology* section beginning on page 62.

Olympia Youth Council Advisors Initial Ideation Process

The first step was defining what having a “successful” youth council means to Olympia youth, and which questions should be asked for national research. The Olympia Youth Council Advisors met for the first time on April 16, and the session was completely run youth who had volunteered. They started with an anonymous word cloud prompt “What are you feeling right now?” The most common responses were *excited, inspired, tired, happy, nervous,* and *calm*. From that initial prompt, further interactive activities and discussions emerged.



The session broke into groups to ideate answers to the question, “What will a successful Olympia Youth Council look like?” The groups brainstormed answers and placed them onto Jamboards. All the answers were collected into one master board. There were more than fifty statements describing what a successful youth council will look like. Here is a snapshot of the final master board:



Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

The statements were grouped into seven primary goals that the Olympia Youth Council Advisors identified as priority measures of what a successful youth council would be in Olympia:

A council that...

- *contributes real change in the community*
- *collaborates and hosts events for youth*
- *empowers, elevates, and hears the voices of Olympia youth*
- *sustains from year to year, with initiatives continuing*
- *is supported by the community*
- *has protocols ensuring welcome, open, and respectful discussions*
- *represents the diverse community within Olympia*

The above themes are answered throughout the *Results of National and Local Research* from youth councils across the country (beginning on page 29). The Olympia Youth Council Advisors also reviewed the recommendation topics that the City asked to be researched, and provided two additional questions of their own. The final list of recommendations specifically requested from the City of Olympia and the Olympia Youth Council Advisors included:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Possible types of city change | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinating with partners | <input type="checkbox"/> Number of members |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best community representation | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative meeting formats | <input type="checkbox"/> Length of term |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diverse school representation | <input type="checkbox"/> Scope and work plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting youth where they are | <input type="checkbox"/> Participant age range | <input type="checkbox"/> Staffing needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Council structures and duties | <input type="checkbox"/> Long term sustainability | <input type="checkbox"/> Member recruitment |

National Research to Identify Standard Practices and Best Practices

Truclusion collected qualitative and quantitative data from across the United States and conducted a mixed methods study. The first step was using city and youth council websites to gather tangible data on youth councils across the country. Truclusion identified seventy-four youth councils from twenty-three states that had publicly available data to explore. (More than a third of the cities studied had populations between 35,000-95,000.) From those cities, 290 documents were analyzed, including youth council webpages, subpages, application forms, bylaws, and handbooks. All seventy-four youth councils were invited to participate in completing surveys, of which 31 participated (more than a third of these 31 had populations between 35,000-95,000).

Adult youth council advisors/liaisons from the 31 cities were surveyed to understand how youth councils are structured, organized, and maintained, including structural questions on youth council membership, positions, committees, meetings, processes, sustainability, and overall impact. Youth council members (youth) were surveyed to capture first-hand experiences, satisfaction levels, participative outcomes, and best practices from youths' perspectives.

Olympia Youth Recommendations

After national research concluded, Truclusion provided the research results to Olympia Youth Council Advisors. The Advisors were then tasked with recommending what they believe is best for a future youth council in Olympia, using their understanding of national standards, best practices, and what will best serve youth in Olympia. The Olympia Youth Council Advisors self-adopted a 66% supermajority threshold for any recommendation they approved. Their approved recommendations are presented under the "Local Youth Recommendations" part of each section in the *Results of National and Local Research* beginning on page 29.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the City of Olympia generally follow those provided by the Olympia Youth Council Advisors, especially when the Advisors' recommendation matches researched best practices and/or standard practices from across the country. There are some recommendations that only match best practices or standard practices from the national research. In each case that a recommendation differs from the recommendation provided by Olympia Youth Council Advisors, an explanation is provided.

Recommendations specifically requested by the City of Olympia

1. Youth council structures and duties

Structures – Youth council structure recommendations are generally covered in the *Youth Council Structure* section of *Results of National and Local Research* (beginning on page 29).

Name: Olympia Youth Council (supported by standard practices, p. 39)

Housed: Housed under City Government as other City committees (standard practices, p. 39)

Funding: Funded from the City General Fund, with access to grants, donations, and other like sources. (standard practices, p. 39)

Youth-Centered Approach: A council led by the youth, with youth voices amplified, youth having decision-making power for the council, autonomy to engage in youth-related initiatives, and youth feeling heard. (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 40)

Duties – Youth council duties recommendations are generally covered in the *Youth Council Purpose & Responsibilities* section of *Results of National and Local Research* (beginning on page 34). Since the Olympia Youth Council Advisors' ideation of the purpose of a youth council in Olympia (page 37), Truclusion is recommending it entirely with some simplification wording changes for the engagement section that hopefully does not take away any of the intentions of the youth. Truclusion recommends adding advising the City Council (standard practices, p. 35).

Community Service – plan and run city-wide events within budget, service projects, scholarships, and additional youth-centered programs, attend and assist general city-wide events important to youth, and volunteer for city initiatives they support.

Civic Engagement – engage with the city government in various ways, including providing recommendations and/or advising the City Council and other City of Olympia officials on city-wide issues related to government affairs and policy in an effort to consider the voice of youth in decision making processes.

Connect Youth with Other Youth, Resources, and Opportunities – serve as a connection between the city and Olympia youth, specifically responsible for speaking on behalf of the youth of the city while also engaging youth with city initiatives, hearing from community members, managing youth-relevant initiatives, establishing partnerships with additional youth groups, providing and sharing opportunities for youth, and establishing and maintaining a media presence.

Advise the City Council on youth community member concerns on matters in the community.

2. Age range for youth participants

Youth Council Members: 14-20 years old on first day of term. Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended a minimum age of 14 and a maximum age of 20, to allow “a wider range of opinions and views” (page 43). This age range is supported by standard practices. For clarity, Truclusion recommends that the age be calculated on the first day of the term. A thirteen-year-old can be appointed if they turn fourteen years old prior to the term starting (which means that they may be thirteen years old during onboarding). A twenty-year-old may be appointed as long as they do not turn twenty-one prior to or on the first day of the term.

Non-Youth Council Member Participants: 13-21 years old on day of participation. For youth who may be participating in youth council activities and is not a youth council member, Truclusion recommends allowing youth thirteen to twenty-one years of age. 13-year-olds are recommended since anyone who is eligible to apply for an upcoming term should be able to participate in youth council activities so that they may become familiar with youth council business prior to application. Since a member may turn twenty-one during their last term, the participation of other twenty-one-year-olds who are not youth council members is also recommended.

3. Youth representation from different schools in the area

Olympia Youth Council Advisors identified having students from different schools as a key indicator of a successful youth council. However, similar to the high value they placed on diversity (see recommendation #15), they did not want one specific identity—including school one attends—to be the sole reason for someone to be appointed to the council. Also, while being a student is one identity, so is also not being a student. Truclusion’s recommendation for school representation is to include student status and school attended as part of the nominating process that prioritizes diversity: (i.e., *Given the applicant pool and qualifications at the time of member recruitment, the City Council shall strive, to the best of its ability, to achieve diversity in geographic residence within the City, gender, age, school enrollment, race, and ethnicity on the Youth Council. No geographic, gender, age, student status, race, nor ethnicity restrictions shall be placed on applicant eligibility.*)

4. Number of members

Recommendation is twenty (20) members on the youth council, with twenty being a standard but not a rule. This means every effort short be made to maintain twenty youth on the council. However, if twenty suitable youth are not available, or if members resign mid-term, it shall not be necessary to appoint unsuitable members or new members mid-term. *Note: Since the recommended appointment process (page 44) recommends that nominations originate from a youth panel, it ensures that the idea of “suitable” is defined by youth and not adults.*

The number twenty comes from Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommending that a future Olympia Youth Council have between 18 and 20 members (page 43) and standard practices showing that the average youth council size across the country is twenty members (page 41). Understanding the large amount of work that the Olympia Youth Council Advisors envisions for a youth council, Truclusion believes that the highest number in the range offered is ideal.

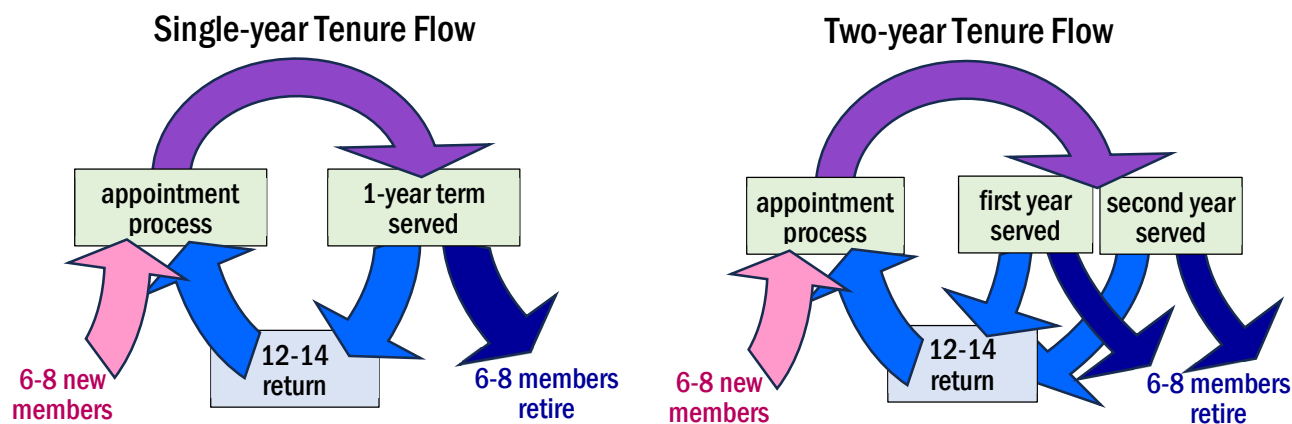
Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

5. Length of term

Truclusion recommends Olympia adopt a one-year term, and is providing a secondary, two-year term option if one-year terms is not possible. Youth council members across the country recommend two strategies: First, experienced and inexperienced youth should serve on the council at the same time, which is accommodated by both one-year and two-year terms (best practices, p. 49). Second, youth should recommit each year, meaning either a one-year term or a two-term term with the ability to offload members mid-term (best practices, p. 49). Olympia Youth Council Advisors agree with both strategies, and they recommend single-year terms in Olympia because it “Gives more freedom to do it to more people including [high school] seniors. Flexibility to everyone so we can have more people actively participating” (p. 50).

Olympia Youth Council Advisors noted that if a one-year term is not possible, then maximum of a two-year terms, and there should be a “check-in” between years one and two, with the possibility of dropping out or removal after one year (p. 50). Below are tenure flow charts based on a 65% retention, including 65% of youth leaving after their first year in a two-year term.

Best practices suggest the average length of youth council service across the country is three years (p.49). Olympia Youth Council Advisors believe three years is the *ideal* number of years youth serve for maximum benefit to the community (p. 50). Truclusion recommends a one-year term to support the idea of serving three years, to help youth avoid removing members each year, and to make participation more appealing to youth (p.49).



Regardless of term length, Truclusion recommends a streamlined nomination process for returning youth council members (best practices, p.49). Whether Olympia adopts a single-year term or two-year term, terms are recommended to begin on September 1 and end on August 31 (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 50) and have a term limit of four years (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 50).

6. Member recruitment

Short-term, meaning to seat the first cohort, Truclusion recommends the city follow the same procedures as was done to seat the Olympia Youth Council Advisors. This recruiting process was heavy on outreach through schools, local organizations serving youth, and social media. Truclusion also recommends promoting the first cohort using word-of-mouth from the forty-two Olympia Youth Council Advisors.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Long-term, meaning after the second cohort, Truclusion forwards the recommendations of the Olympia Youth Council Advisors, and recommends that there be a standing subcommittee to perform the following:

- Marketing the youth council to Olympia youth (page 33)
- Operationalize social media to strategically engage Olympia youth
- Direct market the youth council in schools
- Host youth-centered events

7. How to meet youth where they are at

Meeting Olympia youth where they are at is a city-specific endeavor. Consequently, recommendations here rely heavily on a blend of Olympia Youth Council Advisors and current city procedures.

All-council Meetings – The majority of all-council business through September through March, scheduling two business meetings at least two weeks apart, 4:00-6:00pm on Wednesdays, in the above months. Meetings should be held as long as there is business to attend to. (Olympia Youth Council Advisors p. 48, best practices pp. 45-46) After review of other City governance and schoolboard calendars, Truclusion recommends that the meetings be held on the first and third Wednesday on months having two meetings, and first Wednesday on months with one meeting. This is to not conflict with other City governance and school meetings. On average, youth council members from across the country said meetings should be planned to last no longer than an hour and a half (best practices p. 46), so the Olympia Youth Council Advisors blocked a 2-hour limit.

Subcommittee Meetings – Subcommittee meetings Mondays, Tuesdays within a 7:00pm-9:00pm window because it precedes Wednesday all-council meetings and “opens up time after sports/school/etc.” Subcommittee meetings were recommended as hybrid with advanced notice so it “Makes it more accessible, emphasizes equity while having an in-person alternative for more efficient meeting” (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 48).

Meeting Modalities – All-council meetings where votes are taken should be “hybrid,” having both an in-person and remote option. Subcommittee meetings where votes are taken should also be hybrid (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 48). “Working” meetings where youth council work is conducted but no official votes are taken can be either in-person or hybrid (best practices p. 48)

Meetings falling on holidays – Meetings falling on holidays be rescheduled at least two meetings prior. (Olympia Youth Council Advisors p. 48)

Providing access – To improve access for all youth, recommend applying the current City expense defrayment stipends to youth council members, in order to help offset transportation, meals and childcare expenses for city governance participation, with a higher defrayment allowed for individual with greater resource needs (best practices, p. 42)

8. Creative meeting formats

To hold true to the Olympia Youth Council Advisors’ desire to have a youth-centric council (p. 40) and based on Truclusion’s years of setting up youth-led organizations, the recommendation is to allow youth council leadership flexibility to set meeting location and format for each cohort and meeting as determined applicable by youth council leadership. Subcommittee and workgroup meetings are also recommended to have flexibility in meeting location and format as desired by those running such

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

meetings. It is strongly encouraged that youth council leadership be exposed to different meeting formats and leadership styles. It is also recommended that the first cohort...

- have the first six meetings intentionally scripted and debriefed with different meeting elements so that youth can encounter and evaluate experiences
- rotate youth leading the first six meetings so that they can better understand how to establish meeting goals and match meeting elements to maximize meeting impact.
- develop a business meeting agenda template

9. Scope and work plan

For Scope, please see *Youth council structures and duties* (#1 above). For work plan, holding true to the Olympia Youth Council Advisors' desire to have a youth-centric council (p. 40) and based on Truclusion's years of setting up youth-led organizations, the recommendation is to allow each youth council cohort to flexibility to define their own work plan. A first year workplan is recommended to complete the formation of a youth council. That would include in alphabetical order:

- Begin budget process for fiscal year 2025 youth council activity expenses, which includes understanding the difference between activity expenses, administrative expenses, and capital expenses.
- Codify youth involvement and driving values for Youth Council appointment processes (both for council members, subcommittee members, and leadership), and support 2024-2025 appointment process.
- Determine how to include non-youth council member youth who wish to contribute to the Youth Council (do they serve with or without receipt of stipend to offset defray expenses.)
- Develop Business Meeting Agenda Template
- Leadership and other Positions, and corresponding responsibilities
- Plan and hold regular and leadership onboardings for 2024-2025 youth council members
- Plan First Youth Council Community Event
- Provide quarterly reports to City Council
- Standing and Initial Subcommittee Descriptions and Responsibilities
- Subcommittee appointments
- Create a Youth Council Governance FAQ, that includes...
 - Roberts Rules Basics
 - Youth Council Organizational Chart
 - How to Spend Money
 - Expectations of Youth Council Members
 - How to receive stipends
 - How to receive community service hours
- Youth Council Master Calendar template (with dates/responsibilities such as meetings, reporting to City Council, budgeting, CLPS work plan meeting, onboardings, etc...)
- Youth Council Mission, Vision, and/or Purpose Statements
- Youth Council Values
- What things need to be voted on at Council/Subcommittee level, which need no vote, which need City Council or City Manager approval

10. Long term youth council sustainability

To ensure a self-sustaining youth council, community engagement and youth empowerment must be prevalent and prioritized (best practices, pp. 31-32)—which explains the recommendation of substantial facilitation and support staff hours scheduled in recommendation #13, Staffing needs. Four additional recommendations to support a sustainable and thriving youth council come directly from the Olympia Youth Council Advisors’ recommendations (p. 33).

Clear structure - the council should be organized, have routine meetings, and lay out clear duties, responsibilities, and goals

Effective marketing - to ensure Olympia’s youth are aware the youth council exists

Equitable selection process - and appointing youth who “want to be there”

Ethical youth-centered leadership - creating awareness of council and recruiting future members

11. Coordinating with partners (i.e. School Board, nonprofits)

It is recommended that a youth council have the authority to partner, within budget, with community entities and organizations (best practices p. 36, standard practices p. 34)

12. Compensation, stipends, and/or school credit

Since the City of Olympia does not pay committee members for their service, it is not recommended to compensate youth council members.

Service Hours – It is recommended that youth council members be able to log their time serving the Youth Council, and report logged hours as “community service hours” for any outside purpose, i.e., school, scholarships, court order, etc. (Olympia Youth Council Advisors p. 44, best practices p. 42, standard practices p. 41).

Expense defrayment stipends – Considering the substantial personal time and resources required to fully participate in a youth council, the cost of surrendering other academic/ nonacademic endeavors, and needing to abandon family obligations in order to participate in a youth council, it is appropriate for the City to provide expense defrayment stipends that help offset transportation, meals and childcare expenses (best practices, pp. 42-43). The City of Olympia has such an expense defrayment process, and it is recommended that the process be extended to include youth council members.

13. Staffing needs

The recommended list of staff responsibilities are taken from the Olympia Youth Council Advisors’ recommendation (page 54), which includes...

- Work with Youth Council and City to ensure youth council member safety and well-being
- Provide and/or secure facilitation guidance and support
- Logistically support Youth Council guest speakers
- Support event coordination and planning as requested by Youth Council
- Assist grant writing for projects as needed
- Finding and reserving meeting space for the youth council
- Ordering supplies and equipment
- Manage Youth Council attendance and stipend disbursements

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

Considering the entire scope of a future youth council, it is recommended to budget facilitation hours at the below schedule, which reflects using an outside facilitation team to train a staff liaison over the first eighteen months. When a future staff change occurs, a rise in outside consulting hours should be expected:

	2024	2025	2026	2027
Email and Phone Communications	223	404	380	380
Full time employee hours	175	350	350	350
Outside consultant hours	48	24	0	0
Meeting Prep, Attendance, Debriefs	400	364	316	296
Full time employee hours	260	296	296	296
Outside consultant hours	140	68	20	0
Administrative & Budget Work	116	116	116	116
Full time employee hours	116	116	116	116
Outside consultant hours	0	0	0	0
Outside Advocacy	8	16	16	16
Full time employee hours	8	16	16	16
Outside consultant hours	0	0	0	0
Youth-run Events	40	72	72	72
Full time employee hours	40	72	72	72
Outside consultant hours	0	0	0	0
Recruiting and Appointment Process	80	64	54	52
Full time employee hours	52	52	52	52
Outside consultant hours	28	12	2	0
Member & Leadership Onboarding	78	53	53	28
Full time employee hours	28	28	28	28
Outside consultant hours	50	25	25	0
Youth Requested or Mediation				
Full time employee hours	36	36	36	36
Outside consultant hours	36	24	12	0
Miscellaneous	40	40	40	40
Full time employee hours	20	20	20	20
Outside consultant hours	20	20	20	20
TOTAL HOURS	1,021	1,135	1,053	1,006
Full time employee hours	735	986	986	986
Outside consultant hours	286	149	67	20

Recommendations requested by Olympia Youth Council Advisors

14. Possible types of impact an Olympia youth council can achieve

Olympia Youth Council Advisors specifically requested research be done on what kind of change can be possible with a youth council. 89% of youth council members studied indicated that they believe their youth council makes a city-wide impact (page 36). Specific forms of viable change that came up in research (pp. 34-38) include:

- Secure more resources allocated to opportunities for Olympia youth
- Develop a greater sense of community amongst Olympia's youth
- Create more opportunities to be outside and in the city, like public parks, events, recreational activities, teen entertainment spots, artistic spaces, community projects
- Foster greater opportunities for youth to volunteer, apprentice, intern, and get jobs

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

- Help clean the community environment
- Host town halls to address problems like STDs and drug epidemics
- Design and implement a mural or sponsor other community art
- Impact policy on issues such as education, health, environment, and social justice
- Establish and fund a youth scholarship

15. Best community representation

Truclusion endorses the Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommendation of setting a nomination goal that ensures the youth council represents all of Olympia youth (p. 40), including race, gender identity and expression, economic backgrounds, sexual orientation, ability, and more. The Olympia Youth Council Advisors do not want a specific identity to be the sole reason for appointment to the council (p. 40). Here is recommended language informed by the Olympia Youth Council Advisors:

Given the applicant pool and qualifications at the time of member recruitment, the City Council shall strive, to the best of its ability, to achieve diversity in geographic residence within the City, gender, age, school enrollment, race, and ethnicity on the Youth Council. No geographic, gender, age, student status, race, nor ethnicity restrictions shall be placed on applicant eligibility.

Truclusion recommends all questions on youth council applications be open-ended questions, and that applications are accessible to youth with a disability, do not speak English, or have no internet access.

Additional Recommendations

16. Appointment Process

The following application, nomination, and appointment process is recommended based on the vision of the Olympia Youth Council Advisors (p. 56)...

1. The Youth Council Selection Panel is appointed by the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee, and shall include up to seven (7) youth and up to two (2) non-voting ex officio adults, all of whom have received bias training. Ex officio adults will only ask questions of youth and will not offer opinions, even if asked.
2. Youth Council applicants will each decide their own form of application (e.g., written, recorded, visual, interview, via recommendations, previous Youth Council experience, or other method).
3. Youth Council candidates will be nominated based on their potential of representing Olympia youth and contributing to a thriving, engaged and effective Youth Council.
4. The youth on the Youth Council Selection Panel will provide CLPS a slate of recommended seven (7) priority executive leadership nominees, eight (8) priority regular member nominees, and up to six (6) additional names for secondary regular member consideration with observations offered about each candidate.
5. The ex officio adults on the Youth Council Selection Panel may provide CLPS up to three (3) regular member nominees for secondary consideration, with observations offered about each candidate.
6. CLPS shall forward a full slate to the City Council for appointment of the recommended slate of priority candidates plus 4 youth from the list of additional names.
7. The City Council considers (approves) a recommendation to the full City Council for appointment of the recommended slate plus 4 youth from the list of secondary candidates.

17. Number of leadership positions

Due to the expansive scope and responsibilities the Olympia Youth Council Advisors envision, it is recommended to have seven (7) leadership positions for the youth council. This is supported by standard practices, which shows that the number of leadership roles for youth councils across the country ranges between one and eleven (p. 52).

18. Onboarding

Standard practices (p. 36) and Olympia Youth Council Advisors (p. 50) mentioned the need for training. One Advisor provided an example of what this could look like: “At the beginning of the year, offer training and capacity-building opportunities to youth council members such as through workshops or seminars that empower them with the necessary knowledge and expectations” (p. 40). While regular exposure to management and interpersonal development will help all youth council members, specific onboarding for first time members is recommended the last three Wednesdays in June, 4:00-6:00pm, the first and third hybrid modality and the second session in-person only. (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, pp. 40 and 48). Truclusion chose the last three Wednesdays because there is a regularly scheduled Youth Council business meeting on the first Wednesday, and the time 4:00-6:00 is the same time as regular business meetings. The second session being in person is to perform some team-building that cannot be completed remotely. One of the onboarding goals identified by an Olympia Youth Council Advisors is creating an environment where “members are comfortable with each other and feel heard, and therefore aren't afraid to speak their minds respectfully.”

Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended leadership training should have three sessions in late June or early July with each being two hours in duration, and with a requirement to attend at least one in-person session (p. 48). Truclusion recommends that leadership members participate in a leadership onboarding immediately following the new member onboardings, from 6:00-8:00pm on the last three Wednesdays of June preceding each leadership term. Leadership is recommended to attend onboarding prior to each year they serve in a leadership role.

19. Residency

Not specifically addressed by Olympia Youth Council Advisors, and based on observed discussions of Advisors wanting youth outside the official city limits of Olympia to be able to participate on the youth council, Truclusion recommends resident approach similar to other City of Olympia Committees: *The majority of Youth Council members shall reside within the corporate limits of the City of Olympia or the City of Olympia Urban Growth Area.*

20. Eligibility

Not specifically addressed by Olympia Youth Council Advisors, and to avoid any appearance of unethical carryings-on, Truclusion recommends that immediate family members of Olympia's Executive Team or Councilmembers shall not be eligible for appointment to the Youth Council.

21. Vacancies

Based on the proposed seating of 20 youth council members at the beginning of each term, Olympia Youth Council Advisors' recommended range of between 18-20 members of the youth council (p. 43) and the Advisors' recommended process for onboarding new members (p. 48), Truclusion recommends waiting until the next appointment cycle to fill any member vacancies. Since leadership positions will likely have responsibilities attached to them, and with the perspective that leadership positions will be frequently filled by experienced youth council members, it is recommended that vacant leadership positions are filled by a current regular member through majority vote of the entire youth council.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

22. Recommended budget expense lines

Based on an encompassing scope of standard practices, best practices, and Olympia Youth Council Advisor’s recommendations, Truclusion recommends the city forecast general operating expenses of the following types:

- Marketing materials, including social media boosting
- Annual event, externally facing for Olympia youth with the idea to inform and recruit
- Apparel so the youth council can be represented at events, field trips, workshops, conferences, food, transportation, events
- Meeting locations and support, such as supplies, food, and beverages
- Transportation
- Travel
- Other Events
- Office supplies
- Prizes/Rewards

Truclusion recommends that the youth council organizes and manages their own budget, with City staff guidance and oversight (Olympia Youth Council Advisors, p. 54).

The following recommended 2024 youth council expenses were approved by the Olympia Youth Council Advisors at their July 9, 2023 workshop. City staff costs and outside consulting/facilitation costs are not included.

Expense	Amount
Marketing Materials, Supplies, and Boosts	\$500
Meeting Food and Beverages	\$2,700
Spring recruiting event / celebration	\$1,000
Apparel	\$1,800
Equity funds	\$1,200
Office Supplies	\$350
Initiative Funds	\$5,000
Treats / Prizes / Incentives	\$400
Trip Somewhere	\$0

23. Ensure provision of viable youth engagement tool(s)

Truclusion recommends that robust youth engagement tools be deployed to ensure maximum ability for the youth council to engage with youth across Olympia. It is recommended that a viable youth engagement plan be developed prior to, or in the first few months of, a future youth council’s existence. Collaboration and guidance from City staff while developing the plan is recommended.

Viable tools will allow for:

- The youth council to directly interact with Olympia youth where and how youth already receive information
- Provide the ability for direct bilateral conversations between the youth council and Olympia youth
- Encourage exponential engagement and open sharing of youth council information by Olympia youth

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

- Allow elevation of grassroots concerns and spotlights through real-time interaction (i.e., crowd spotlighting and voting)

Prior to plan development, the following are recommended for City Staff:

- Develop an understanding of how youth engagement is different from communication, and while some tools of engagement may be traditionally used by the City for communication, exploring new uses for the same tools may be beneficial.
- When the Youth Council and City staff disagree on engagement needs and approaches, prior to the City rejecting youth initiatives, City staff identify the specific steps needing to be done in order to grant the initiative. This step protects the City from being accused of age-discrimination (e.g., “youth are not responsible enough to manage that tool” or “we don’t allow adult committees to do that so we won’t allow youth to do it either”).
- Since engaging with youth is an exceptional endeavor, alternate solutions will likely require new and unique engagement processes. Remain diligent in identifying alternate solutions and methods for a youth council to engage with Olympia youth.
- Establishing specific goals and trying tools on temporary bases may: (1) help City staff better understand the needs of youth and identify more effective tools or implementation processes; and (2) help youth better understand effectiveness, limitations, and risks of different tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN PRACTICE

This section includes two templates the City may use to establish a youth council (1. Ordinance Components for a Youth Council and 2. Initial Youth Council Procedures), and a third template of next steps for teeing up a successful youth council launch. Footnotes reference specific recommendations and page numbers that inform the language.

1. Recommended Ordinance Components for a Youth Council

Established--Purpose

There is hereby established in the City of Olympia a twenty (20) member¹ Youth Council whose overall purpose is fostering a relationship between the City of Olympia and its youth, and empowering youth with access and contribution in City governance. The Youth Council strives to ensure youth voices are heard by the City of Olympia, creates an environment where youth can flourish, and fosters tangible, sustainable posterity for future generations.

Members

- A. Membership. There shall be twenty (20) members of the Youth Council; seven (7) appointed as Youth Council *executive leadership* members,² and thirteen (13) appointed as Youth Council *regular* members.
- B. Residency. The majority of Youth Council members shall reside within the corporate limits of the City of Olympia or the City of Olympia Urban Growth Area.³
- C. Compensation.
 1. Youth Council members shall serve without compensation, but shall receive a stipend⁴ of Twenty-Five and no/100 Dollars (\$25.00) per Youth Council business meeting, Youth Council special meeting, or Youth Council subcommittee business meeting, attended to defray expenses such as transportation, meals and childcare. A member may waive receipt of any stipend offered by the City of Olympia. If a member certifies in writing they are a low-income person, as administratively determined by the City of Olympia, the stipend shall be \$50.00 per meeting attended.
 2. Youth Council members may log their time serving the Youth Council, and report logged hours as “community service hours” for any outside purpose.⁵
- D. Age Qualification. In order to serve as a Youth Council member, members shall not be younger than 14 years old and not older than 20 years old on the first day of their appointed term.⁶

¹ 20 members supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #4, page 10)

² 7 leadership positions supported by standard practices (Recommendation #17, page 17)

³ Residency majority comes from Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #19, page 17)

⁴ Stipend similar to direction provided by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #12, page 14)

⁵ Service hours supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and best practices (Recommendation #12, page 14)

⁶ Age range supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #2, page 10)

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

E. Appointment.⁷

1. The Community Livability and Public Safety Committee will forward a slate of recommended appointees based on recommendations by the Youth Selection Panel to the full City Council for consideration.
2. Youth Council Members are appointed by majority vote of the Olympia City Council in an open public meeting.
3. Members serve at the discretion of the City Council and may be removed from office for any reason by majority vote of the City Council in a public meeting.
4. Immediate family members of City Councilmembers or the Executive Team are not eligible for appointment to the Youth Council.

F. Recruitment and Nomination.⁸

The Youth Council Selection Panel shall provide the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee (CLPS) a slate of seven (7) priority executive leadership nominees, eight (8) priority regular nominees, and up to ten (10) secondary regular nominees. The Community Livability and Public Safety Committee will submit a recommended slate of seven (7) executive leadership candidates and up to thirteen (13) regular candidates to the City Council for appointment.

1. The Youth Council Selection Panel is appointed by the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee, and shall include up to seven (7) youth and up to two (2) non-voting ex officio adults, all of whom have received bias training. Ex officio adults will only ask questions of youth and will not offer opinions, even if asked.
2. First-time Youth Council applicants will each decide their own form of application (e.g., written, recorded, visual, interview, via recommendations, or other method). Returning Youth Council members may have a streamlined application.
3. Youth Council candidates will be nominated based on their potential of representing Olympia youth and contributing to a thriving, engaged and effective Youth Council.
4. The youth on the Youth Council Selection Panel will provide CLPS a slate of recommended seven (7) priority executive leadership nominees, eight (8) priority regular member nominees, and up to six (6) additional names for secondary regular member consideration with observations offered about each candidate.
5. The ex officio adults on the Youth Council Selection Panel may provide CLPS up to three (3) regular member nominees for secondary consideration, with observations offered about each candidate.

Note: It is an imperfect endeavor to have adults nominate and appoint youth who shall represent and speak for Olympia's youth. Consequently, the intention of the above process is to have CLPS favor recommendations from youth on the selection panel. Consideration of candidates by CLPS should be based on the selection panel's recommendations and observations provided to CLPS, rather than CLPS using their own criteria or process to identify successful candidates.

⁷ Appointment process reflects Olympia Youth Council Advisors vision and City precedent (Recommendation #16, p. 16)

⁸ Recruitment and Nomination process supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #16, pp. 16)

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

- G. Diversity.⁹ Given the applicant pool and qualifications at the time of member recruitment, the City Council shall strive, to the best of its ability, to achieve diversity in geographic residence within the City, gender, age, school enrollment, race and ethnicity in the make-up of the Youth Council. No geographic, gender, age, student status, race, nor ethnicity restrictions shall be placed on applicant eligibility.
- H. Non-Partisan.¹⁰ All Youth Council positions are non-partisan.

Term of Office

- A. The term of office for Youth Council members shall be one (1) year,¹¹ except as modified by the City Council, and such terms shall commence on September 1 and conclude August 31 of the following year.
- B. Members shall be limited to four (4) full one-year terms.¹² Partial terms will not be counted toward the number of terms considered. Upon a motion properly made and seconded, the City Council may waive a term limit restriction upon a vote of a majority of the City Council.

Vacancies¹³

- A. Vacancies of Youth Council regular members shall remain unfilled until the next Youth Council appointment period, unless the City Council determines that a vacancy shall be filled or in the event the number of vacancies prevents the Youth Council from having a quorum. Any person appointed to fill a vacancy shall be appointed for the remainder of the unexpired term.
- B. Vacancies of Youth Council executive leadership shall be filled by a regular Youth Council member upon majority vote of the Youth Council. Any person appointed to fill an executive leadership vacancy shall be appointed for the remainder of the unexpired term, resulting in their regular member spot becoming vacant.

Rules of Procedure and Bylaws

Rules of Procedure and Bylaws for the Youth Council shall be established by a two-thirds approval vote of the Youth Council, and ratified by the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee of the City Council.¹⁴

Annual Work Plan

The Youth Council shall present an annual work plan to the City Council for approval in a format and within parameters determined by the City Council's Community Livability and Public Safety Committee. Substantive changes to the work plan after approval by the City Council shall be submitted to the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee for consideration and recommendation to the full Council.¹⁵

⁹ Valuing diversity supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and best practices (Recommendation #15, page 16)

¹⁰ Non-partisan language reflects City precedent

¹¹ 1-year terms supported Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard practices (Recommendation #5, page 11)

¹² Limit of 4 terms supported Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard practices (Recommendation #5, page 11)

¹³ Vacancy language based on Olympia Youth Council Advisors vision (Recommendation #21, page 17)

¹⁴ Procedures and bylaws language provides the youth the power to set their own rules (Recommendation #1, page 9)

¹⁵ Work plan language reflects City precedent for other Committees

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Staff Liaison Support¹⁶

The City Manager, or designee, shall appoint a primary staff liaison for the Youth Council to ensure that meeting notifications and recordkeeping occurs consistent with applicable State laws; and to:

- A. Work with Youth Council and City to ensure youth council member safety and well-being;
- B. Provide and/or secure facilitation guidance and support;
- C. Provide oversight of the youth council budget and budgeting process;
- D. Help recruit potential youth council applicants;
- E. Support youth council application process as requested by Youth Council;
- F. Partner with Youth Council Executive Leadership to create meeting agendas;
- G. Logistically support Youth Council guest speakers;
- H. Help communicate meeting schedule changes;
- I. Support event coordination and planning as requested by Youth Council;
- J. Assist grant writing for projects as needed;
- K. Finding and reserving meeting space for the youth council;
- L. Ordering supplies and equipment;
- M. Manage Youth Council attendance and stipend disbursements;
- N. Maintain correspondence in keeping with the Youth Council's work plan approved by the Council;
- O. and other duties related to the support of the Youth Council as they arise.

Duties of Youth Council¹⁷

The Youth Council is empowered to take the following actions:

- A. Community Service – plan and manage, within budget, city-wide events, service projects, scholarships, and additional youth-centered programs, attend and assist general city-wide events important to youth, and volunteer for city initiatives they support;
- B. Civic Engagement – engage with the city government in various ways, including providing recommendations and/or advising the City Council and other City of Olympia officials on city-wide issues related to government affairs and policy in an effort to consider the voice of youth in decision making processes;
- C. Connect Youth with Other Youth, Resources, and Opportunities – serve as a connection between the city and Olympia youth, specifically responsible for speaking on behalf of the youth of the city while also engaging youth with city initiatives, hearing from community members, managing youth-relevant initiatives, establishing partnerships with additional youth groups, providing and sharing opportunities for youth, and establishing and maintaining a media presence;
- D. Advise the City Council on youth community member concerns on matters in the community; and
- E. Other duties as appropriate.

¹⁶ Staff liaison supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard practices (Recommendation #13, pages 14-15)

¹⁷ Youth council duties supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard practices (Recommendation #1, page 9)

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

Non-Youth Council Member Youth Participation¹⁸

Any Olympia youth between fourteen (14) and twenty-one (21) years old who are not members of the Youth Council are welcome to participate in Youth Council activities, unless a supermajority of the Youth Council votes to exclude them from participation.

Budget¹⁹

Youth Council programs and operating expenses shall be funded from the City General Fund, grants, donations and other like sources. The City Manager shall include said budget within the annual operating budget of the City. Programs and operating expenses will be based on, and not exceed, funding allocated through the budgeting process.

All expenditures will be a component of the City General Fund and bound by the legal limits of government finances.

¹⁸ Non-youth council member participation supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #2, page 10)

¹⁹ Budget and funding language reflects City precedent for other Committees

2. Recommended Initial Youth Council Procedures

Until such a time that the Youth Council approves, and the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee of the City Council ratifies, a new set of Youth Council procedures, the Youth Council shall follow Olympia's *Committee Rules of Procedures*,²⁰ with the following superseding procedures:

1. Whenever possible, the bulk of Youth Council governance and business work shall be discussed and voted on between October 1 and March 31 each term. Youth Council programming, communication, and community outreach may continue throughout the entire year.²¹
2. The Youth Council shall conduct regularly scheduled business meetings.
 - a. Business meetings shall occur on the first and third Wednesdays of January, February, March, September, and October; and the first Wednesdays of April, May, June, July, August, November, and December.²²
 - b. Business meetings shall begin at 4:00pm and be reasonably planned not to exceed two (2) hours in duration.²³
 - c. Business meetings shall be conducted in hybrid modality (i.e., both in-person and remotely).²⁴
 - d. Youth Council Executive Leadership can cancel a scheduled business meeting if determines there is insufficient business to justify a meeting.²⁵
 - e. If a scheduled business meeting will land on a holiday observed by the Youth Council or City of Olympia, the Youth Council will vote to reschedule the meeting and announce the new day / time at least two business meetings prior the originally scheduled meeting.²⁶
3. Special meetings (i.e., not previously scheduled) to discuss specific agenda item(s) may be called either by the Youth Council Executive Leadership or through recorded petition of at least five Youth Council members.²⁷
4. First-time Youth Council appointees shall participate in three (3) onboarding training sessions, 4:00pm - 6:00pm the last three Wednesdays in June preceding their term commencement. The first and third sessions will have in-person and remote options. The second session must be attended in person.²⁸

²⁰ Procedures approval language reflect similar City precedent

²¹ Youth council "business" season supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #7, page 12)

²² Scheduled meeting days supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #7, page 12)

²³ Meeting times chosen by Olympia Youth Council Advisors / supported by best practices (Recommendation #7, page 12)

²⁴ Meeting modalities supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and best practices (Recommendation #7, page 12)

²⁵ Insufficient business rule supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and best practices (Recommendation #7, p. 12)

²⁶ Holiday meeting rescheduling supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #7, page 12)

²⁷ Special meeting language added by Truclusion to ensure ability for the youth council to meet if needed

²⁸ Member onboarding supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors and standard practices (Recommendation #18, p. 17)

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

5. All Youth Council executive leadership members shall participate in three (3) training sessions 6:00pm - 8:00pm on the last three Wednesdays in June preceding their executive leadership term commencing. The second session must be attended in person. The first and third sessions will have in-person and remote options.²⁹
6. The Youth Council is authorized to establish through majority vote, standing subcommittees and other subcommittees as needed to meet programming needs.³⁰
 - a. Subcommittee business meetings shall occur on Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, starting no earlier than 6:00pm and ending not after 9:00pm. Subcommittee business meetings are subject to the same meeting notifications, recordkeeping, and hybrid modality as Youth Council business meetings.³¹
 - b. Subcommittees may also hold “work” meetings to discuss, plan, implement events or projects, and program without regard to recordkeeping required for business meetings. Such working meetings: shall be announced to the youth council when scheduled; do not need a quorum to occur; need not have a hybrid option; do not need recorded minutes; and cannot take action that countermand prior Youth Council or subcommittee decisions.³²
7. Youth who are not members of the Youth Council can volunteer to Youth Council programs and initiatives, without eligibility to receive stipends to offset defray expenses such as transportation, meals and childcare.³³

²⁹ Leadership onboarding schedule supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #18, page 17)

³⁰ Formation of subcommittees supported by standard practices (Recommendation #9, page 13)

³¹ Subcommittee meeting time and modality supported by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #7, page 12)

³² “Work” meetings language added by Truclusion to ensure youth can collaborate to perform duties

³³ Non-member participation desired by Olympia Youth Council Advisors (Recommendation #2, page 10)

3. Recommended Next Steps for Setting up for a Successful Youth Council Launch

It is recommended that the first Olympia Youth Council cohort be appointed prior to December 31, 2024.

It is further recommended that the Olympia Youth Council Advisors workgroup continue meeting and accomplish the following pieces of work prior to appointing the first Olympia Youth Council cohort. Some of the items will require more City staff collaboration/guidance than others. It is recommended that the City provides Olympia Youth Council Advisors with stipends to help offset costs incurred by their participation.

- Begin budget process for fiscal year 2025 youth council activity expenses, which includes understanding the difference between *activity expenses*, *administrative expenses*, and *capital expenses*.
- Codify youth involvement and driving values for youth council appointment processes (both for council members, subcommittee members, and leadership), and support 2024-2025 appointment process.
- Collaborate with City staff to establish engagement and communications plans
- Create standing and initial ad hoc subcommittee descriptions and responsibilities
- Determine how to include non-councilmember youth who wish to contribute to the youth council (do they serve with or without receipt of stipend to offset defray expenses.)
- Develop an agenda template for youth council business meetings
- Draft a youth council governance FAQ, including
 - Expectations of youth council members
 - How to receive stipends
 - How to receive community service hours
 - How to spend money
 - Roberts Rules basics
 - Youth Council Organizational Chart
- Identify what things need to be voted on at Council/Subcommittee level, which need no vote, which need City Council or City Manager approval
- Leadership and other positions, and corresponding responsibilities
- Mission, Vision, and/or Purpose Statements
- Plan regular member and leadership onboardings for first youth council
- Plan a community youth council recruiting event
- Youth council master calendar template (with dates/responsibilities such as meetings, reporting to City Council, budgeting, CLPS work plan meeting, onboardings, etc.)
- Youth council Values (determine set for all cohorts or set by each cohort)

RESULTS OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL RESEARCH

Results of nationally researched practices and locally researched recommendations are separated into nine sections:

Section 1 – Successful and Sustainable Youth Councils

Section 2 – Youth Council Purposes and Responsibilities

Section 3 – Youth Council Structures

Section 4 – Youth Council Membership

Section 5 – Youth Council Meetings

Section 6 – Youth Council Member Terms

Section 7 – Roles of Youth Council Members

Section 8 – Youth Council Application & Selection Processes

Section 9 – Adult Youth Council Advisors / Liaisons

Each section is further separated into three subsections: *Standard Practices*, *Best Practices*, and *Local Youth-Informed Recommendations*. Below are descriptions of what type of data is represented in each of the three subsections:

***Standard Practices* (typical practices across the United States)**

These subsections describe youth council liaisons and members' perceptions on the ways in which their youth council is structured, designed, organized, and implemented. For context, these respondents, on average, scored a four on a five-point satisfaction scale regarding their youth council's structure and/or processes. Thus, we discuss in *Standard Practices* the most common responsibilities & duties, leadership positions, city-wide impact, diversity, meetings, and compensation of youth councils from those considered generally satisfied with their youth council.

***Best Practices* (current U.S. youth council member recommendations)**

Throughout the research, youth council members were asked how they believe youth councils should be constructed, organized, designed, and implemented. Specifically, researchers inquired regarding youth council meetings and the most available time frames, compensation, and the most important qualities for youth council liaisons/advisors to display. In the *Best Practices* subsections, statistical and thematic data are presented in an effort to illustrate the major recommendations from current youth council members across the United States.

***Local Youth Recommendations* (recommendations from Olympia youth)**

Forty-four Olympia youth participated as Olympia Youth Council Advisors in the recommendation process to help inform the structure of a potential future Olympia youth council. All Advisors participated in the ideation process and provided input and feedback as to how a youth council will best be structured in Olympia. 26 of the 44 participated as workgroup members, who collectively determined and presented recommendations included in the *Local Youth Recommendations* subsections.

Successful and Sustainable Youth Councils

STANDARD PRACTICES

Impact – The majority (60%) of youth council liaisons stated their youth councils have an impact/influence on city-wide decision-making through their intentional relationships with the mayor, city council, and various city commissions. Regarding intentionality, many youth councils have direct access to the mayor to advise and communicate recommendations on behalf of the youth of the city. Similarly, many city councils create space and time for youth councils to provide insight on relevant issues and join city-wide campaigns and projects at city council meetings. Examples of the impact of a youth council comparable to Olympia are illustrated through this insight from a youth council advisor/liaison:

“[the youth council has participated in] a plastic bag ban (prior to the state’s) and to propose a ranked-choice voting resolution, campaigns against vaping and another project was called project sticker shock, where they worked with local liquor stores to place educational stickers about the dangers of underage drinking. More recently, the City received around a million dollars from the sale of the [local stadium] to be used on youth activities or resources.”

Sustainability – To maintain a youth council long-term, the most frequent comments suggested that making sure that youth are *having fun* is a must-do. Specifically, advisors/liaisons emphasized that they must intentionally foster an engaging and enthusiastic atmosphere for youth. This “fun” environment was described as including fun activities, food, promoting comradery as a team, and keeping the youth active in the community. Another important component of maintaining a youth council long term is consistently selecting passionate and dedicated youth council liaisons. Specifically, respondents stated these adults should be passionate, dedicated, develop trust, support the council, recruit, and be willing to serve long-term. Illustrating the importance of selecting advisors seeking to serve with longevity, one respondent stated, “Advisors that come and go for only a period of a few months cause a lot of problems, miscommunication, and difficulties with the youth on the council.” The final major key to a sustainable youth council is to ensure youth’s voices are wholly heard. Respondents stated to keep youth engaged in this role, they must have a sense of accomplishment, whether it’s through developing skills, having the autonomy to engage in meaningful projects, and gaining real-world experience in politics. Additional keys to sustainability listed included consistency and commitment of members, being flexible with youth’s schedules, funding, support of the mayor, and marketing the council in relevant ways.

advisors/liaisons emphasized that they must intentionally foster an engaging and enthusiastic atmosphere for youth.

BEST PRACTICES

Survey respondents listed various important factors to maintaining a youth council in an effort to be a successful and sustainable entity. The most common factor listed was to prioritize *youth engagement*. Specifically, (1) all youth council members should be included, (2) there should

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

be effective communication within the council, (3) engaged in meaningful projects, (4) ensure the youth have an impact on their community, (5) maintain good energy, and (6) keep it fun with activities and games. Regarding the importance of fun, one respondent said, “Making sure everyone is having fun so that they want to join again the next year. Recruiting more members and making the council an exciting and eventful place to be.” This insight is incredibly relevant to the next theme youth suggested, which is to actively *recruit and advertise* the youth council. Specifically, participants discussed how it is important to ensure individuals are aware the youth council exists and consistently recruit new youth to join. For example, one participant provided some examples of what this recruitment strategy should look like, “Continually recruiting new members and engaging with existing members is crucial to the long-term sustainability of a youth council. This includes creating outreach strategies to reach diverse groups of young people, as well as providing opportunities for members to actively participate in meetings and projects.” Additional keys to sustainability included collaborating with city organizations/governments/schools, a good leader, good youth, and consistency in meetings and events.

When seeking youth across America’s advice for the city of Olympia, participants consistently discussed three primary items (1) *setting clear purpose, goals, guidelines, and expectations*, (2) *recruitment and advertising*, and (3) *engagement*. Additional minor themes of advice included *having patience and tenacity, identifying potential partnerships, securing funding, having a good advisor and good student leaders, and obtaining the youth’s advice during the planning process*.

Once the youth council is established, it’s important to keep the youth engaged through “making it fun,” “having activities,” “involving youth in city events,” and allowing the “youth to lead.” For example, one respondent said, “Don’t overlook your youth council. The youth have voices, ideas, and opinions they want to project, which are often very creative and innovative. As the future of the community, you should put as much support into your youth council as any other city committee.”

When youth council members were asked how their youth council could improve, primary themes of improvement included: increasing engagement by having more projects and events; having a better overall council structure; improving communication; and addressing more relevant topics and issues to youth. Secondary themes of improvement included soliciting consistent feedback from youth and strengthening partnerships.

From survey participants describing a successful youth council, two primary core themes arose, *community engagement*, and *youth empowerment*. Being *engaged with the community* through events, initiatives, projects, and youth is a key to their success. In fact, youth want the council to be visible to community partners. As one participant illustrated, “If I was to walk up to a random high school student and ask ‘Do you know of [our youth] council?’ If they say yes, then the youth council has succeeded.” In short, the youth want to feel like they are making a difference in their community. For example, one participant said, “If you’re making visible

“Continually recruiting new members and engaging with existing members is crucial to the long-term sustainability of a youth council.”

- youth council member

“Don’t overlook your youth council. The youth have voices, ideas, and opinions they want to project, which are often very creative and innovative. As the future of the community, you should put as much support into your youth council as any other city committee.”

- youth council member

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

effects to your community and things would be worse for your community if the youth council didn't exist.” Next, a successful youth council was described as an entity that *empowers youth* on and off of the council. For example, one respondent said, “A successful youth council is one led by the youth and serves the community through projects and actions they make or advocate for.”

Regarding the youth living in the city but not on the council, one participant said, “A successful council is one that has substantive outreach with the teens in their city. Each initiative that the council has created must have a large number of teens involved in everything that they do -- our job is to provide opportunities for youth, so there's no point in doing what we do if we have no impact. A large audience is KEY.” Similarly, another participant said, “A successful youth commission provides ways for the youth in their city to learn, enjoy, and connect with those around them.” Other descriptors participants used to describe a successful youth council were “diversity,” “clear goals,” and “having fun.”

“there’s no point in doing what we do if we have no impact.”

- youth council member

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Defining a “Successful” Youth Council – During an Olympia Youth Council Advisors ideation workshop led by Olympia youth, many ideas of how Olympia youth will define a “successful” youth council were identified. Here are five major themes of success:

- A successful youth council will have “contributed real change in the community.”
- A successful youth council is one that “creates an environment for youth to succeed.”
- A successful youth council “lets the students of Olympia voices be heard.”
- A successful youth council will “have access to council alumni contacts to discuss past unfinished goals, input, and more from past Olympia youth council members.”
- A successful youth council will “have the support of other community councils, students at different schools, parents and people involved in the school system and government.”

Impact - Olympia Youth Council Advisors were prompted to complete the statement “*Wouldn’t it be fantastic if...*” in order to gauge the desires of Olympia’s youth. Through analyzing this data, the primary theme identified was “More Opportunities in Schools.” Specifically, 41% of the youth indicated the need for vast and diverse opportunities and resources in schools including PE alternatives (e.g., art, music), mental health resources, vocational workshops, drivers’ education courses, and anti-bullying programs. For example, one youth advisor said, “Have more vocation-based workshops and workers from each force come to teach students first-hand. (Finance workshops, home economics, electrical, etc.)” Other themes emerging from this prompt included:

- Olympia engaging more with their youth
- The local environment/community being taken care of and/or restored
- Youth had greater accessibility to resources such as healthcare and college
- Olympia values and supports diversity
- Housing disparity and homelessness is aggressively addressed
- The public transportation system is improved
- If debt was no longer a problem

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Sustainability – The Olympia Youth Council Advisors also came up with several recommendations for maintaining a sustainable youth council. Here are the top five themes of recommendations:

- The youth council must have a clear structure. Specifically, the council should be organized, have routine meetings, and lay out clear duties, responsibilities, and goals. For example, one youth advisor indicated the youth council should have “Regular meetings, regular communication, and continuous work on solutions to problems together, build committees within the council, create a mission, create goals, and create a vision, report the work of the council to the public.” As goals were an essential component to the youth, one of the youth said, “A way to make sure that the youth council stays long term is implementing some goals for us to reach in order to show that we are making a positive impact on the community.”
- Provide effective marketing to ensure Olympia’s youth are aware the youth council exists. For example, one youth advisor said, “I’m sure many kids in this area would like to join and make a difference in our community but they just don’t know about it.” In turn, the youth said youth should be actively recruited by creating awareness through the aforementioned platforms (social media, schools, etc.).
- The youth council’s structure shall implement an equitable selection process. Speaking directly to this, youth emphasized the importance of holding “legitimate elections” so that “diverse representation” is an output. Additionally, identifying youth who “want to be there” should be a critical screening component within this selection process. For example, one youth advisor said, “Make sure to recruit people that care about the community and will make it a better environment for everyone.”
- Ensure the council is led by ethical youth-centered leadership. For example, a youth advisor provided attributes of ideal leadership, “Professional support but with independence encouraged, guidance without being overbearing.”
- The council should regularly host community events as this can serve them dualistically, creating awareness of the council and recruiting future council members. To illustrate this idea, one youth advisor said, “The council could also put on smaller events every few months such as a movie night, or an ice cream social to keep members engaged, as well as incentivized, and others will know about the kinds of cool events the council gets to participate in to get them excited about joining.”

“I’m sure many kids in this area would like to join and make a difference in our community but they just don’t know about it.”

- Olympia youth

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Many youth councils across the USA are responsible for providing tangible deliverables to the city. As mentioned in the advising theme, many youth councils deliver recommendations to the city council on city-wide issues and youth-relevant matters on policies, programs, budgets, planning, goals, and action plans. Some youth councils conduct formal presentations to government officials that illustrate their recommendations. Additionally, some youth councils produce monthly reports, goals, action plans, and annual work plans.

Civic Engagement – Next, youth stated their youth council engages with the city government in various ways, including learning about governmental affairs, policy development, providing recommendations, advising city council, and voting on city affairs on behalf of the youth. Speaking to the policy-making and recommendations, one respondent said, “youth councils may develop policy recommendations on issues such as education, health, environment, and social justice. These recommendations can be presented to local government officials or other stakeholders.

Liaisons also said that a key responsibility for many youth councils is actively engaging with and advising their local government (mayor, city council, city officials, school districts, boards, park districts, etc.) on city-wide issues, in an effort to illuminate youth-relevant issues and provide recommendations. In this, youth councils work with the city council and the mayor to (a) provide a youth’s perspective on city-wide planning, policies, practices, and initiatives, (b) address the needs of youth, (c) offer opportunities to participate in local boards and committees, (d) problem-solve, and make key decisions. To illustrate this relationship, a youth council located in West Virginia, comparable in population to Olympia, states, “Our administration wants young people at the table with us when we are making decisions that impact their future.”

City Youth Liaison – Given the unique position of youth councils in their city, youth councils often serve as a liaison between the city’s youth and the city’s government, responsible for communicating to the government and the youth. Specifically, giving a voice to the youth through the council creates an “open communication system” between the city and its youth. On the other end of the spectrum, youth council members must educate their peers not serving on the youth council on relevant city issues and initiatives.

Specifically, youth councils are responsible for speaking on behalf of the youth of the city while also engaging youth with city initiatives. For example, one participant said, “some primary responsibilities are to engage, educate, and inspire youth across the City...” This is operationalized in various ways, including providing managing youth-relevant initiatives, providing and sharing opportunities for youth, and establishing and maintaining a media presence. The types of opportunities that are provided include events, scholarships, and additional youth-centered programs. For example, one respondent said, “We also have created programs like a youth scholarship, period access [name of city], and even a grant.”

Additionally, many youth councils have established social media accounts, magazines, newspapers, and podcasts. For example, one respondent said this is a current focus of their youth council, “Most recently, we have been focused on creating and growing our podcast and our youth spotlight program.” These avenues of communication have been core to establishing connectivity and remaining connected to their city’s youth.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Youth council members are responsible for establishing partnerships with additional youth groups, community organizations, and schools to develop strategies that address youth-centered problems collaboratively. This aids in establishing a rapport between youth and city government. Youth council members are expected to plan, implement, attend, and host various community events.

Meetings – The last and least mentioned responsibility of youth councils was youth council meetings. Respondents said they are required to attend youth council meetings and their associated responsibilities to remain active members of the council. For example, one respondent said their youth council members are responsible for “attending monthly meetings, participating actively in a sub-committee, and attending common council meetings.” Additionally, one respondent said members of their youth council are required to attend city and youth council meetings, “Attend two city council meetings and only miss 30% of the regular meetings.”

Training & Development – Youth respondents in the study did not mention training or development, and advisors/liaisons did mention that councils across the USA are designed for youth council members to be trained and developed in various ways. To acquire a unique skillset, youth council members are responsible for and expected to attend local and national conferences, workshops, and retreats to develop leadership and communication skills further, acquire civic education, and receive training from city partners.

BEST PRACTICES

To effectively establish a structure within the youth council, participants stated that they suggest Olympia clearly define the youth council’s purpose, goals, guidelines, and expectations. Doing so will guide the application process, the youth that’s interested and selected, the issues they address, and the leadership/committee structure. To illustrate the importance of this theme, one participant said, “Clearly define the purpose and goals of the youth council. This includes identifying the issues that the council will address, the activities it will undertake, and the impact it hopes to achieve. Make sure the purpose and goals align with the city's overall vision and mission.”

89% of respondents indicated that they believe their youth council makes a city-wide impact, and they attribute their success primarily to (a) planning and attending purposeful city-wide projects, (b) strong leadership and support from their liaison/advisor, city council, mayor, and fellow youth council members, (c) partnerships and collaborations with city organizations, and (d) their media presence through magazines and podcasts. On the contrary, youth council members that didn’t believe their youth council makes city-wide impact attributed this to them being “overcompensated and never getting anything done,” or simply a lack of opportunities to make a city-wide impact. For example, one respondent said “We just kind of keep to ourselves. Our service projects are service, but they aren't anything big. I haven't had an impact on my city besides cleaning off one or two people's headstones.”

89% of respondents indicated that they believe their youth council makes a city-wide impact...

When youth council members were asked how their youth council could improve, a primary theme of improvement was providing more opportunities to interact with the government.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended the following as a future Olympia Youth Council’s purpose and role:

Community Service – *The Olympia Youth Council shall plan and run city-wide events, service projects, scholarships, and additional youth-centered programs. They shall also attend and assist at general city-wide events important to youth, and volunteer for city initiatives they support.*

Civic Engagement – *Engage with the city government in various ways, including learning about governmental affairs, policy development, providing recommendations, advising city council, and voting on city affairs on behalf of the youth. Advising the mayor, city council, and other decision-makers (city officials, school districts, boards, park districts, etc.) on city-wide issues, in an effort to illuminate youth-relevant issues and provide recommendations. (Emphasis on Advising, not making final decisions)*

Connect Youth with Each Other, Resources, and Opportunities – *The Olympia Youth Council shall serve as a connection between the city and Olympia youth. Specifically, they are responsible for speaking on behalf of the youth of the city while also engaging youth with city initiatives. Hearing from community members, managing youth-relevant initiatives, establishing partnerships with additional youth groups, providing and sharing opportunities for youth, and establishing and maintaining a media presence.*

Olympia Youth Council Advisors purposely underlined “Advising” in the civic engagement section to put “Emphasis on Advising, not making final decisions.”

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors stated that they would like a youth council structure that allows youth the ability to impart change in the City of Olympia. The Advisors have named various examples of changes they would like to occur in Olympia. Of principle importance, Olympia’s youth reported they want Olympia’s government to foster a relationship with its youth through improving engagement. Specifically, 47% of the youth suggested the need for more resources to be allocated to their youth to ultimately develop a sense of community amongst Olympia’s youth. To illustrate this, one participant said, “I’d like to see more social events for youths in Olympia

“I want to see there be more opportunities for young people to be outside and in the city, like public parks, events, and meets, etc. something for kids to meet each other that either doesn't require payment or is affordable for us.”

- An Olympia Youth

so that we have an overall stronger social connection, I find that a lot of people tend to only know people they met at school.” Similarly, another youth advisor stated, “I want to see there be more opportunities for young people to be outside and in the city, like public parks, events, and meets, etc. something for kids to meet each other that either doesn't require payment or is affordable for us.” Additional ways the youth would like to be engaged included “recreational activities,” “teen entertainment spots,” “artistic spaces,” “apprenticeships and internships,” and “community projects.” Regarding apprenticeships and internships, a youth advisor said, “I want to see more

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

opportunities for youth to volunteer, apprentice, intern, or get jobs. Resources for youth could be more broadly spread throughout Olympia to reach everyone.”

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors held a workgroup session, where 59 different ideations specific to creation of a successful Olympia Youth Council were named and categorized into themes and helped inform the below purpose and role recommendation. Here are a couple examples:

- *Youth involvement in collaborations and events.*
- *The Community Council and Youth Council should interact regularly to collaborate to address both a future for Olympia Youth and a present for Olympia adults.*
- *The council should work closely with the local colleges (SPS& Evergreen) to help support youth in their studies.*
- *Contribute real change in the community.*
- *Debates led by youth in Olympia.*
- *Youth are empowered to stand up and make change.*
- *Events (like a yearly summit) are sponsored where kids who didn't make it into the youth council have the chance to meet elected officials, and learn new skills of community activism.*

Olympia Youth Council Advisors named various strategies that a future youth council can implement to maintain a relationship with the city’s youth at large. The three primary strategy themes emerging from this insight are social media, school marketing, and community events:

Social Media

Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommend the youth council create social media accounts and operationalize these platforms to engage with their city’s youth. For example, one youth advisor suggested the use of these social media accounts should be strategic, “I believe using eye-catching social media posts will create a relationship with Olympia’s youth population.”

School Marketing

Olympia Youth Council Advisors indicated marketing the youth council and its affiliated events at schools is paramount. The youth suggested the council should use schools to visit and give presentations, advertise, host focus groups and additional events, send out surveys, and hold meetings. In its essence, Olympia’s youth believe the youth council can establish a presence in Olympia through, “Visiting different schools in the different districts to spread awareness and promote.”

Community Events

Olympia Youth Council Advisors suggested a future youth council host youth-centered community events such as “seminars,” “clothing drives,” “outreach programs,” and “youth town halls.”

Youth Council Structure

STANDARD PRACTICES

Youth Council Names – Across the youth councils analyzed, all included the term “youth” in their name. Through the lens of phrasing, 56% of these entities are named the “youth council,” 18% utilize “Mayor’s Youth Council,” 16% use “Youth Committee,” 4% use “Mayor’s Youth Commission,” 2% use “Youth Advisory Committee,” less than 1% use “Youth Advisory Council” and “Parks & Recreation Youth Advisory Board.” Through using statistical techniques with this data, we are confident that 45-68% of youth entities/councils across the USAs use the phrase “Youth Council” in their name.

Housed – Youth councils across the USA are primarily housed directly under the city government, without being in a specific department. Others are placed in the following departments; parks & recreation, customer care, human services, public relations, and community service.

Youth Council Funding – Over 90% of youth council advisors/liaisons stated youth council’s primary source of funding comes from the city government, with only two youth council advisors/liaisons expressing they are not given a city operating budget, depending on fundraising. However, regardless of the primary funding source, many youth councils seek financial opportunities through grants, fundraising, and county funding opportunities. Considering most youth councils primary source of funding is from the city government, 62% of advisors/liaisons said their youth is not involved in their youth council budgeting process.

Resources – Various resources are necessary to run a youth council. Of principal importance, running a youth council needs an operating *budget*. To build the infrastructure and culture, money is needed for marketing materials, field trips, workshops, conferences, food, transportation, events, and youth council apparel. Next, *support* from the mayor, city manager, city officials, schools, parents, and the community at large is needed for youth councils to be successful. Other resources mentioned as important to successfully run a youth council include dedicated advisors/liaisons, meeting space, engaging guest speakers, time, and dedicated youth.

Expenses – The primary expenses associated with running a youth council are *meeting, travel, event,* and *apparel* expenses. Regarding *meetings*, many youth councils provide food and additional refreshments for the youth. Other meeting expenses include office supplies, prizes, and transportation. Because many youth councils *travel* to conferences, field trips, and additional events, transportation, lodging, and food are relevant expenses. Many of the youth councils studied do not provide transportation to attend meetings, as 74% of youth council liaisons stated they don’t provide transportation for their youth council members to fulfill these civic duties. Regarding *events*, youth councils also host events, such as conferences and banquets, which pose a significant expense for youth councils. Many youth councils get youth council-specific *apparel* designed, such as t-shirts, jackets, hoodies, etc., to represent their councils at meetings and events tangibly.

BEST PRACTICES

Research did not identify any best practice recommendations on structural youth council changes beyond what was standard operating procedures.

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Olympia Youth Council Advisors provided structural advice for the city to consider while preparing to launch a youth council. From this advice, three primary themes emerged; (1) utilize a youth-centered approach (2) create a strong infrastructure, and (3) consider diversity. We expound on these themes below.

Youth-Centered Approach – When developing the youth council, the youth advisors suggested the importance of employing a youth-centered approach. Specifically, Olympia’s youth want a council led by the youth, with youth voices amplified, youth having decision-making power for the council, autonomy to engage in youth-related initiatives, and youth feeling heard. Speaking directly about this youth-centered approach, one youth advisor said...

“I think there should be an emphasis put on everything being youth-related as that will attract more interest and act as a collective space for youth to feel heard. There is this conception that we must listen to adults and wait for our turn, but most of the change today is enacted by this generation - youth. So, from the start, it needs to be made clear that it is a YOUTH council where OUR ideas and opinions are being discussed.”

Regarding “feeling heard”, one youth advisor discussed adults’ tendency to marginalize youth’s voices, “Listen to us, that’s why you brought us in. I know it seems silly to say, but really pay attention and listen to what your youth council members have to say. I’ve heard too many horror stories of school boards that don’t listen to student feedback and it ends up costing them.” Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommend a structured system of operations to ensure all youth council members’ ideas can be communicated and taken action on in appropriate manners.

Strong Infrastructure – Another theme emerging from this prompt was the importance of establishing a strong infrastructure for the youth council. Olympia Youth Council Advisors mentioned the need for structure and systems within the application process, meetings, development, leadership, and activities. In fact, a youth advisor provided an example of what this structure could look like, “At the beginning of the year, offer training and capacity-building opportunities to youth council members such as through workshops or seminars that empower them with the necessary knowledge and expectations. Establish a system for ongoing evaluation and reflection to assess the council’s activities/performance and identify areas for improvement.” Other items the youth mentioned prioritizing are scheduling, communication, and governance.

Consideration for Diversity – Olympia Youth Council Advisors suggested they want their council to reflect various races, gender identities and expressions, economic backgrounds, sexualities, and abilities, due to their influence on the diversity of thought. They included lived experiences and extracurricular activities as diverse identities. One youth advisor said, “Make sure to consider people of many different backgrounds to ensure the youth council is comprised of many different opinions and thoughts. This will promote meaningful conversations.” Similarly, another youth advisor stated, “I really hope that we can create a youth council with people from different racial, gender, and economic backgrounds so we can have input from different viewpoints.” Ultimately, the youth advisors would like their youth council to be representative of the diversity amongst their peers to better serve their city. Olympia Youth Council Advisors stated that youth should not be appointed to the youth council based solely on identity. They suggested that it is not someone’s identity alone, but their lived experiences that can be shared and represented that is valued.

Youth Council Membership

STANDARD PRACTICES

Amount of Members – Data regarding the amount of members seated on youth councils were primarily retrieved from the online websites (e.g., membership lists, handbooks, etc.). The average number of members that serve on the youth councils studied is 18. However this number ranged from 6 to 60, with the most common number of youth council members on youth councils is 20.

Compensation – 70% of respondents indicated they are not compensated for serving as a youth council member. The 30% of those who indicated they are compensated, stated they are primarily compensated with service hours, food, and merchandise. Very few participants said they are compensated through additional ways, including money, scholarships, and end-of-the-year banquets and ceremonies.

Youth Council Application/Qualifications – The most common qualifications listed on youth council applications include being a city resident and a High School Student in good academic standing. Additionally, many applications required letters of recommendation.

BEST PRACTICES

When youth council members were asked how their youth council membership could improve, a primary theme of improvement was wanting their youth councils to have more members.

Diversity – When youth council members were asked how their youth council could improve, a primary theme of improvement was diversity to better represent the community they serve. 72% of respondents indicated diversity has a major impact on their youth council because it provides opportunities for usually marginalized/minoritized voices to be amplified, promotes equal opportunity, and allows them to serve their entire community better. Regarding amplifying marginalized/minoritized voices, one respondent said, “I myself am Latino and feel my voice is heard and respected.” Another respondent discussed the importance of diversity in addressing issues across the entire community ...

“Diverse voices have a great impact in our council as this reflects how we represent the different demographics in the community. Issues that we may not know about are brought to our attention, which allows us to take the appropriate actions quickly and efficiently.”

Additionally, a participant discussed how diverse voices help monitor bias, “...People are inherently biased, so having multiple perspectives voiced lowers the amount of blind biased action happening.” Lastly, another respondent spoke to how diverse voices in their youth council prompted the creation of a youth council podcast, “Our group is very opinionated and loves sharing our own thoughts and ideas, which is one reason we started the podcast.”

On the contrary, the respondents that stated diversity doesn’t have an impact on their youth council indicated their youth council lacks diversity, primarily because of a trickle-down effect of their city lacking diversity. This suggests cities lacking diversity in certain demographic categories will experience challenges composing a diverse youth council. Unfortunately, this may impact the success of the youth council because, as a respondent suggested, the lack of diversity produces

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

limited ideas, "..., [my city] tends to have very limited diversity, so there's not a lot of other perspectives or opinions on the council."

Compensation – Through implementing various coding techniques, the insight below captures the major themes illustrating how survey respondents believe youth council members should be compensated for their service. The major items discussed were recognition & acknowledgment, community service hours, monetary rewards, and treats. When youth council members were asked how their youth council could improve, a secondary theme of improvement was compensation.

Recognition & Acknowledgement

The most prominent way (33% of responses) in which youth would like to be compensated for their service is to be recognized and acknowledged for their work. In fact, they suggested this recognition can come in various forms, including certificates, banquets, ceremonies, media spotlights, letters of recommendation, scholarships, and graduation cords. For example, one participant spoke to many of these suggestions ...

"Recognizing youth council members for their contributions and service is also a form of compensation. This can include certificates of achievement, letters of recommendation, or other forms of recognition that can help youth council members build their resumes or college applications."

Some participants suggested the importance of an end-of-the-year celebratory event to recognize youth council members for their service. Next, because serving on the youth council is a leadership position within itself, a participant said, "As a leadership position, a scholarship should be awarded awards, social media spotlight, newspapers, graduation pin."

Community Service Hours

The second most prominent response (27% of responses) was that many youths believe their participation should be strictly service, with no monetary gain. In fact, many of the respondents are satisfied with service/volunteer hours as one participant stated, "The experience is rewarding enough." Discussing the value of servitude, one participant said, "Through seeing the impact they have in their communities. Being a member of a youth council means servitude, not receiving accolades for providing for your fellow human beings." Lastly, one participant said it frank, "I do not think that we should be compensated for our service because it is "service."

Regarding those that may not be able to receive service hours, one participant shed light on remaining inclusive "Those who do not or cannot take service hours, should be on the council or to have a discussion with the youth and youths parent's to see if a medium is possible." For example, one participant suggested serving on a youth council could be offered as an internship, "Some youth councils offer educational opportunities, such as scholarships or internships, as compensation for council members."

Monetary Rewards

The next most cited (25% of responses) form of compensation desired was money. Some participants believe youth should be financially incentivized through grants, per diem, stipends, or gift cards, for various reasons. Drawing from the service theme, some respondents suggested obtaining service hours isn't enough. For example, one respondent said, "Volunteer hours don't

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

work to motivate students equally so that a financial incentive would be the most appealing.” Similarly, another respondent discussed the importance of financial incentives to being inclusive to all socio-economic backgrounds ...

“They should be compensated with MONEY. I am being totally serious when I say this. I love being part of the youth commission, and at first, hours were enough for me, but when I realized that I dedicated 6-8 hours a week to the work I do with the council, monetary compensation became an interest to me. A stipend would be ideal for Commissioners; it encourages productivity and also guarantees that students who may have to provide for their families economically will have something to bring back home. For example, a student who has to work after school to sustain their household cannot afford to be part of the Commission, especially if they aren't paid for their time.”

Building upon this insight, some participants conceptualized their service as a youth council member as a job. For example, a respondent said, “because it is a job, payment will allow youth to not need another job that will take away time from the city.”

Treats

Lastly, participants indicated youth council members should be compensated with supportive resources, including food for meetings and merchandise (shirts, hats, etc.) so they can represent their youth council at events.

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that a future Olympia Youth Council have between 18 and 20 members because that is “a great number to equally represent all of the communities in Olympia.” They also recommend a minimum age of 14 and a maximum age of 20, to allow “a wider range of opinions and views.”

Diversity – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended not selecting members solely on the basis of demographic information to have representation within the council. However, since diversity on the council is a paramount desire, peoples’ contributions and capacity to represent their identities on the youth council is encouraged to be used as criteria for selection to the youth council. Here are some related statements from Olympia Youth Council Advisors:

“Our council should reflect the diversity within our community.”

“A council that is inclusive and diverse, representative of all the youth in our area.”

“People on the council should represent all schools and backgrounds.”

“I think that this council would look like the youth in Olympia, both reflecting diversity racially and in gender identity.”

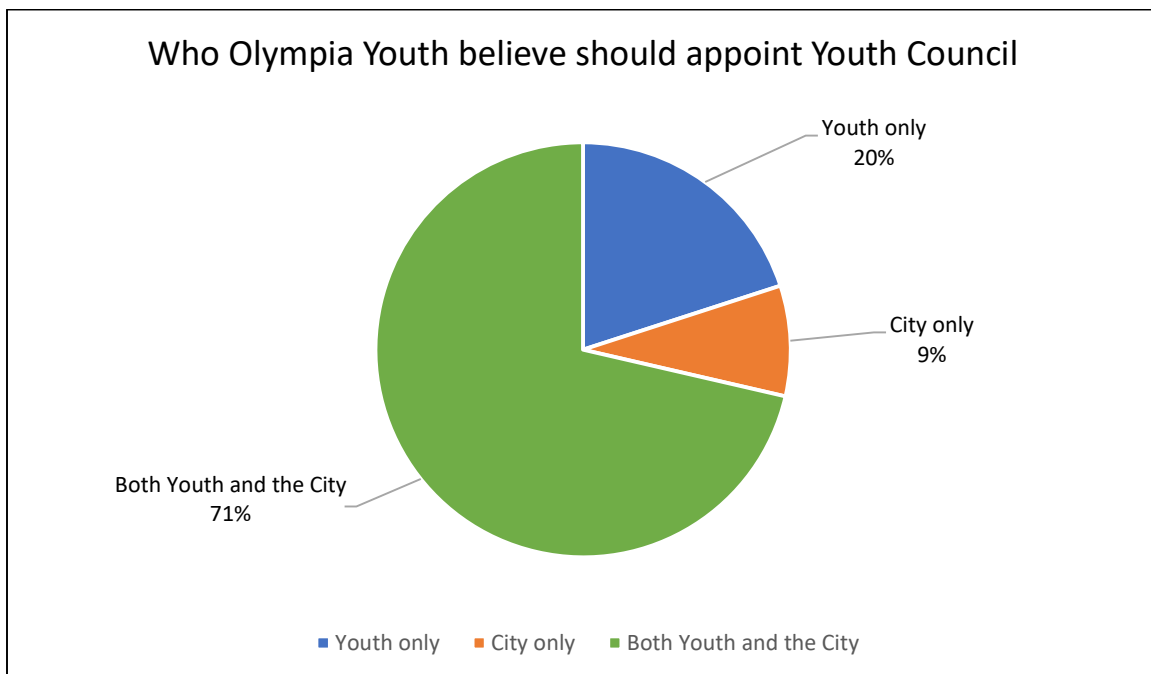
“An inclusive environment filled with many youth in Olympia who are proactive and willing to advocate for others.”

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

Compensation – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that future Olympia Youth Council members be compensated with \$200, community service hours based on participation, and a couple other benefits not yet named. This amount of compensation was named because it is the amount that Workgroup members received and could be raised later if necessary. 62% of Olympia Youth Council Advisors also said that the City of Olympia should be responsible for setting the amount of monetary compensation youth council members receive.

Opportunities for Non-council Members – The Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that just because someone did not get selected as a youth council member initially, there should be other opportunities to contribute to youth council endeavors, because “not getting in doesn’t mean there is no potential.”

Appointment of Youth Council Members – More than 90% of Olympia Youth Council Advisors believe that youth should be involved in selecting and appointing members to the youth council. 20.0% said that youth should have the only say, and 71.4% prefer a blend between youth and the City. 8.6% of Advisors believe that the City should appoint youth council members without youth involvement.



Youth Council Meetings

STANDARD PRACTICES

Meeting Days & Times – The most common day meetings are held are Wednesdays (34%), Tuesdays (29%), Mondays (15%), Thursdays (13%), Fridays (4%), and Saturdays (2%). The most common times meetings start are 6:00 pm and 6:30 pm.

Meeting Frequency – According to youth council websites, the majority (56%) of youth council meetings meet monthly, 41% meet twice a month, and 4% of youth councils meet weekly. 53% of survey respondents indicated they meet monthly, 35% meet biweekly, 6% meet weekly, and 3% meet bimonthly.

Meeting Structure – These meetings generally consist of a welcome, presentations of old business (updates from last meeting/approving last meeting minutes), new business (project and event updates, new initiatives and ideas), guest speakers, games, and food. Primarily, the youth council’s leadership (chair, mayor, etc.) runs these meetings, with assistance from the youth council’s adult advisor/liason.

BEST PRACTICES

Youth Council “Season” – Participants ranked the months that are most convenient for them to engage as a youth council member, and the data suggests August-March is the ideal time frame. Below are months in the order of most convenient to least.

1. October (68%)
2. September (64%)
3. January (59%)
4. November (58%)
5. March (54%)
6. February (53%)
7. August (49%)
8. December (48%)
9. April (44%)
10. July (43%)
11. June (38%)
12. May (35%)

Youth Council Meeting Frequency – The majority of the youth in our sample indicated youth council meetings should be held once a month. Below you will find the exact statistics.

Monthly	53%
Twice per week	30%
Bimonthly	12%
Once a week	7%

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

Youth Council Meeting Days/Times – Youth in our sample indicated that weekdays after school hours work best for holding youth council meetings. Specifically, Tuesdays and Thursdays were the most desirable days, and 6-8 pm was the most suggested time frame. In this, the youth emphasized the importance of avoiding weekends due to extracurricular conflicts. Further, on average, the youth said these meetings should last no longer than an hour and a half, with most youth indicating meetings should last 60 minutes.

In-person, Virtual, or Hybrid? – 71% of the respondents said the most effective modality to hold youth council meetings is in-person, while 29% suggested hybrid as the most effective. No respondents said virtual only was the most effective.

Optimizing Engagement and Effectiveness

– We captured what youth in our sample believes makes youth council meetings effective and engaging, and answers are represented in the adjoining word cloud. Through employing structural and In Vivo coding techniques, the data suggests effective and engaging youth council meetings are *purposeful*, led by good *leadership*, promote *discussion*, have *guest speakers*, *hands-on*, encourage *participation*, promote *team building*, and have *food*. We expound on each theme below.

Purposeful - The youth in our sample indicated youth council meetings should be purposeful, organized, and focused. To ensure these meetings are purposeful, they should consist of structure, an agenda, and meaningful items to discuss. For example, one respondent said, “Youth council meetings should have a clear purpose and a well-planned agenda that outlines the topics to be discussed, goals to be achieved, and the expected outcomes.” Additional participants expounded upon the importance of having an agenda, “Having an organized agenda makes things more effective and engaging because it allows for delegates to know ahead of time what will be discussed and properly prepare.” Having a well-planned meeting allows time to not be wasted.” Regarding this idea of maximizing time, one participant said, “When meetings are short and to the point and don’t go on for multiple hours, I think the youth are more engaged.” In short, designing meetings as purposeful promotes youth engagement, leading to effective and meaningful outcomes.

Effective & Engaging Leaders - In order to have purposeful meetings, youth leaders (i.e., chairs, co-chairs, etc.) must be *effective and engaging*, as these are the individuals who create agendas and lead the meetings. More specifically, respondents said youth leaders must be organized, passionate, and present in order to navigate meetings effectively. For example, one participant said, “Commissioners must be invested in their projects, or else nothing will get done.”



Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Discussion - Another core element of effective and engaging meetings are meaningful discussions. According to the data, youth want to have discourse surrounding relevant and intriguing topics with all their fellow youth council members. In fact, various respondents illustrated the importance of creating a safe space to address relevant topics so varying perspectives can rise. For example, one respondent said, “A diverse group of members can bring different perspectives and ideas to the table, which can lead to more creative and effective solutions.” To promote inclusive discussion, participants suggested discussions should be creative, because, as one respondent said, “Sometimes people feel like they can't speak in large groups. Do your best to give them chances to speak.”

Guest Speakers - Continuing with this idea of creativity in meetings, our respondents value when guest speakers talk to them during their meetings. Specifically, youth enjoy community-based guest speakers. For example, one respondent said, “Youth Commission meetings feel especially engaging when a member of city government comes to speak as a guest. This allows us insight into government policy and planning to engage the youth.”

“Youth Commission meetings feel especially engaging when a member of city government comes to speak as a guest. This allows us insight into government policy and planning to engage the youth us.”

- youth council member

Games/Hands-on Activities - As much as survey respondents value discussions and guest speakers, of the utmost importance, our respondents indicated the need for hands-on activities. Various respondents mentioned how they want to have fun because, as one of the youths stated, “I didn’t sign up for a lecture.” Specifically, at meetings, youth want time to engage in small and large group activities, games, and socializing.

Friendship/Interactions/Team Building - Regarding socializing, our respondents stated youth council meetings should be utilized to interact with their fellow youth council members so they get to know them and establish rapport and relationships. Some respondents suggested a way to foster this is through implementing team-building exercises at meetings: “It is also very effective to have team building exercises in order for the council members to become more comfortable interacting with others and voicing their opinions.” Coinciding with this insight, many respondents stated developing friendships within the youth council promotes their engagement.

Participation - Next, respondents discussed the importance of everyone participating in meetings. According to the youth, when everyone attends meetings in person and participates in conversations, meetings are effective. Expounding on this idea of active participation, a respondent stated, “Encourage active participation from all members of the council. Facilitators can do this by creating an open, welcoming environment where all members feel comfortable contributing.”

Food - Lastly, various participants discussed the importance of food (snacks, treats) being offered at meetings, especially since they’re often held after school around dinnertime.

When youth council members were asked how their youth council could improve, primary themes of improvement for meetings were offering more interactive activities, better locations, flexibility around time conflicts, higher meeting frequencies, and improving overall meeting structures.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

All-council Meetings – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that a future Olympia Youth Council conducts the majority of all-council business through October through March, because “we are more likely to get a wider variety of participants and people with more available schedules.” They further recommended providing members with enough time to receive and process information between meetings, that two business meetings be scheduled in the above months, and meetings be held as long as there is business to attend to. Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that meetings falling on holidays be rescheduled at least two meetings prior. Below are the percentages of support months received from youth councils across America (included in best practices above) and Olympia Youth Council Advisors:

Month	Youth Councils across U.S.	Olympia Youth Council Advisors
October	68%	62%
January	59%	50%
November	58%	44%
September	64%	41%
February	53%	41%
August	49%	30%
March	54%	29%
July	43%	21%
April	44%	15%
June	38%	18%
December	48%	15%
May	35%	8%

Olympia Youth Council Advisors further recommended that the majority of all-council business is conducted on Wednesdays from 4:00pm-6:00pm. One Advisor shared: “I think that having meetings on the weekends in the school year would be hard. Kids would not be very happy about their weekend being taken up with this, but after school on weekdays would probably work better.” Hybrid meetings are recommended (in-person with a virtual option), because it will allow more people to be a part of the council.

“I think that having meetings on the weekends in the school year would be hard. Kids would not be very happy about their weekend being taken up with this, but after school on weekdays would probably work better.”

- Olympia youth

Subcommittee Meetings – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended subcommittee meetings be held on Mondays and Tuesdays within a 7:00pm - 9:00pm time slot because it precedes the Wednesday all-council meetings and “opens up time after sports/school/etc.” Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended subcommittee meetings be held hybrid with advanced notice so because it “Makes it more accessible, emphasizes equity while having an in-person alternative for more efficient meeting.”

Youth Council Member Terms

STANDARD PRACTICES

Drawing from youth council websites and affiliated handbooks, the majority of youth council terms last for one year (58% of councils have one-year terms, the next highest is two-year terms at 20%). Youth council terms primarily run during the school year months, September-June.

BEST PRACTICES

The most prominently occurring theme from youth council members across the United States was ensuring an overlap between experienced and inexperienced youth council members, such as having two-year terms with half of the council appointed each year, or single-year terms with a streamlined reappointment process. One youth council member suggested “there needs to be a group of students on the youth commission that stays engaged with the activities and know what they are doing” while another reflected “they can teach the first years what worked and what didn't to make a more effective council.”

The average number of years youth council members surveyed across the country anticipate they will serve was 3 years.

“there needs to be a group of students on the youth commission that stays engaged with the activities and know what they are doing.”

- youth council member

Reasons current youth council members suggest a 1-year term

“I think a one year term is best because they should maintain a standard that should be reviewed every year to ensure that they are still fit to be on the council.”

“People's situation during high school can change very quickly, so short terms are better.”

“I know people who joined our youth commission [during their last year of eligibility], and therefore wouldn't be eligible for a 2-year term.”

“While many will choose to reapply, I feel it's important to revisit the applicant at 1 year just to recommit in a sense.”

“I personally had to take a break from my youth council after 1 year of service because I knew I could not make the commitment with my busy schedule. High school gets very busy and unfortunately you can't always do everything you want. . . . In my opinion 1 year terms will make the council a lot more flexible with much more activity among its members.”

Reasons current youth council members suggest a 2-year term

“You don't have to fill out the application every year.”

“Kids don't have to rewrite an entire essay.”

“You can learn from the experiences you had your first year.”

“It gives them an opportunity to help make improvements on city activities their second year and help events run smoother.”

“With extra time comes experience with events. You are familiar with what has been done in the previous year, there isn't a large learning curve and you can mentor others who are new.”

Youth Council Research & Recommendations for the City of Olympia, Washington

One youth council respondent had served under both a one-year term and a two-year term. They shared this perspective:

“Having undergone both options, I believe that a 1-year term is more beneficial than 2, because more and more incoming youth have an opportunity to share their ideas with the city and take action opposed to an older council member who may not be giving their ‘all’ so to speak as far as their commitment and collaboration.”

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Term Duration - Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommend that the council member term for a future Olympia Youth Council is 1-year term, because it “Gives more freedom to do it to more people including seniors. Flexibility to everyone so we can have more people actively participating.” They also noted that if a one-year term is not possible, then maximum of a two-year term with a “check-in” between the first and second year, with the possibility of dropping out or removal after one year. The average number of years Olympia Youth Council Advisors said a youth will “ideally” serve on the council was three, and maximum number of years being four.

“[a one-year term] gives more freedom to do it to more people including seniors. Flexibility to everyone so we can have more people actively participating.”

- Olympia youth

Term Start/End Dates - Olympia Youth Council Advisors also recommended that the council member term for a future Olympia Youth Council starts on August 1 and ends on July 31, and with “a flexible ending so we can keep doing projects over the summer.” This is in case “we want to still do projects over the summer and believe that we should have flexible meetings over the summer.”

Term Limits - They recommend that council members be limited to serving four years “because it allows to have people who have been on the council before but also allows for a lot of new people who will have new ideas and viewpoints.”

Onboarding for new members – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that new council members of a future Olympia Youth Council have an onboarding process that extends three weeks in late June, with one 2-hour onboarding session each week. Onboarding is recommended to have a hybrid option, while encouraging youth to participate in person. They further recommend that about 10% of the onboarding be led by former and/or current Olympia Youth Council members. One of the goals for onboarding is creating an environment where “members are comfortable with each other and feel heard, and therefore aren't afraid to speak their minds respectfully.”

Onboarding for leadership – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended leadership training should have three sessions in late June / early July with each being two hours in duration, and with a requirement to attend at least one in-person session. This timing is to avoid advanced placement testing and also respect the plans of athlete training for fall sports.

Roles of Youth Council Members

STANDARD PRACTICES



Youth council liaison/advisor data provided insight into the most prominent active leadership roles in youth councils. Over 90% of youth councils analyzed have leadership roles, ranging from one to eleven roles per youth council. Below you will find the types of leadership roles in the order of their prevalence.

Frequency of title in respondent councils:

more than 25%	10% - 25%	Less than 10%
Mayor, Secretary Chair, Vice Chair, Mayor Pro Tem	Treasurer, Historian	Vice President, Recorder, Communications Director, City Manager, Volunteers Coordinator, Timer, Social Media Chair, Social Chair, Service Coordinator, Recording Secretary, Publicity officers, Publicity Director, Public Relations, President, Planner, Media Specialist, Media Assistant, Marketing Director, Manager, Jr. Commissioners, Hospitality Coordinator, Finance, Director, Coordinator, Community Service Chair, Community Coordinator, Communications, Attorney/Deputy Recorder, Attendance Secretary

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

The majority (55%) of youth councils analyzed have sub-committees/task force groups based on relevant projects and events to their youth council. Examples of committees are listed below.

Advocacy	Diversity Wellness	Social / Community Service
Arts & Culture	Environment	Summer Tour
Branding	Economic Development	Youth Entrepreneurship
Budget	Health and Wellness	Youth Magazine
By-laws	Hospitality	Youth Outreach
Civic Engagement	Interview	Youth Philanthropy
Communications	Marketing	Youth scholarship
Cultural Awareness	Retreat	

26% of the youth council member respondents indicated they serve in a leadership capacity and provided insight into their role. Below you will find the ways in which they describe the leadership positions they hold.

- Chair**
- “Lead meetings, connect with my members, and plan community outreach projects”
 - “Delegating meetings, creating agendas, spearheading events, and oversee all committees and projects”

- Co-Chair**
- “Responsible for:
 - coordinating members and organizing meetings
 - leading discussion in meetings
 - meeting with liaison outside of meeting times
 - working to create successful projects and meet commission goals
 - coordinating with city councils in commission projects”

- Vice Chair**
- “ I am tasked with managing the several initiatives our Commission creates, as well as ensuring that any tasks necessary to the success of those initiatives are completed. I, alongside the Chair, aspire to foster a positive working environment”
 - “Filling in for the Chair when absent. Filling in for treasurer when absent. Filling in for Secretary when absent”
 - “ Act as the right man for the chairman to regulate meetings and hold events”

- 2nd Vice Chair**
- “all of the same responsibilities of a Vice Chair, just not approved by Council

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

- Mayor Pro Tem**
- “I step in for the mayor when absent and serve as a leader towards others”
 - “sort of "vice" mayor who is in charge when youth mayor is absent”
 - “As mayor pro tem my responsibilities are to carry out meetings or events when the junior mayor is not present. I'm second in command after the junior mayor and we both inform and keep in touch with our members about different events”
- Historian**
- “Take pictures, make videos, social media, make sure everyone feel welcome and included”
- Secretary**
- “take and keep minutes, taking attendance, and rising to an occasion”
 - “I take the minutes during the meeting, make the agendas, and take roll call during the meetings”
 - “responsibilities include presenting to council, reaching out to specific students, creating posters and joining monthly meetings to assist in creating an agenda for the following meetings”
 - “take note of meetings/create minutes”
- Timekeeper**
- “I am in charge of making sure meeting start and end on time”
- Arts & Culture Committee Chair**
- “Collaborating with Performing Arts centers across the metroplex”
- Activity Board Executive**
- “help plan and run activities as well as help members get to know each other better”
- Leadership Committee Executive**
- “plan events, conduct meetings, send information out to leadership council, etc”
- Events Coordinator**
- “My responsibilities include making sure the council has volunteers at city events, and that those who volunteer know what time and place they are volunteering”
- Head of Public Relations**
- “I was responsible for planning some of our major events and Setting up posters and announcements for all of our community events. I also wrote reports on our activities and they were released in the city newspaper”
- Financial Officer**
- “I collect receipts to get refunded from the city and give monthly updates on the councils budget usage”

BEST PRACTICES

Research did not identify any best practice recommendations on structural youth council changes beyond what was standard operating procedures.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Selection – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that a future Olympia Youth Council select its leadership in a three month window prior to the end of the active term, because this allows advanced notice to all the participants and gives the future leadership more control over how the next term is structured.

Youth / Adult Splitting of Responsibilities – Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended the following split of youth council responsibilities between youth and advisor(s)/liaison(s):

Youth Only

- Managing meeting minutes
- Speak for the youth council

Primarily Youth with Advisor/Liaison Overseeing

- Organizing and managing the youth council budget

Shared between Advisor/Liaison and Youth

- Help recruit potential youth council applicants
- Sort youth council applications
- Interview youth council applicants
- Determine youth committee and leadership roles
- Creating meeting agendas
- Inviting guest speakers
- Communicate meeting scheduling changes
- Determining the youth council budget
- Coordinating and planning youth events
- Grant writing for projects as needed
- Ensure safety and well-being of youth council members

Primarily Advisor/Liaison with Youth Overseeing

- Finding and reserving meeting space for the youth council
- Ordering supplies and equipment

Advisor/Liaison Only

- Overseeing attendance

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Youth council liaisons/advisors (most common), the city mayor (2nd most prevalent), city council (3rd), and youth council members (4th) are the most prominent parties involved in the selection process. Regarding youth council members' involvement, 60% of council liaisons stated youth are involved in the selection process through interviews and decision making. For example, one liaison/advisor said their youth council utilizes a “youth-driven” approach throughout their application process, intentionally excluding adults, allowing the youth to lead and select the new youth council members.

BEST PRACTICES

Youth council members suggest Olympia develop a recruitment plan to shed light on the fact that a youth council exists, which will attract youth to apply to be a member of the council. This is important because one participant said, “Make sure to publicize that a youth council exists because I didn't know my city had one for the longest time.” Next, once youth council members have been seated, it's important to keep the youth of the city aware of their events, programs, and initiatives. To advertise, the youth council participants suggested attending school events and local businesses. For example, one participant said, “Send kids to Back to School night as it's a great time to recruit. Talk to the band director / coaches to get more kids. An invitation goes a long way. Chick Fil A will help too ha.”

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended the following application and selection process for a future Olympia Youth Council:

1. *Youth Council Selection Committee members shall be 6 youth along with up to 2 ex officio adults (non-voting), all of whom have received **bias** training. Ex officio adults will only ask questions of youth and will not offer opinions, even when asked.*
2. *Youth Council applicants can decide their form of application (can be written, recorded, visual, an interview, through recommendations, or other methods). If enrolled in school, youth must be passing their classes as a minimum, and if not passing help will be provided.*
3. *Youth Council members will be selected based on their **potential** of representing Olympia youth and contributing to a thriving engaged and effective Youth Council.*
4. *The youth on the Selection Committee will provide the CLPS a slate of recommended priority appointees that is 4 less than the final number and up to 6 additional names for secondary consideration with observations offered about each candidate.*
5. *The ex officio adults on the Selection Committee shall provide the CLPS up to 4 additional names of candidates for secondary consideration.*
6. *CLPS shall forward a full slate to the City Council for appointment including the recommended priority candidates plus 4 youth from the secondary candidate list.*
7. *The City Council considers (approves) a recommendation to the full City Council for appointment of the recommended slate plus 4 youth from the list of secondary candidates.*

Adult Youth Council Advisors / Liaisons

STANDARD PRACTICES

Title – Reviewing the websites of youth councils across the USA made it apparent that the title of the adults staffed in this role varied throughout youth councils. Thus, the survey began by asking the title of their role. Survey data revealed 16 out of 31 respondents’ official title was “advisor,” nine were “liaison,” four were “coordinators,” one was “overseer,” and one was “director.” In short, the most prominent titles of this role are “liaison” and “advisor.”



Staffing – Next, respondents provided insight into how many adults are staffed in this role within their youth council. 14 respondents stated one adult is staffed in this role, nine respondents said two, three respondents stated four adults are staffed in this role, one respondent indicated four adults are staffed in this role, one respondent indicated five adults are staffed in this role, and one respondent stated six adults are staffed in this role. In sum, the vast majority of youth councils have three or fewer adults staffed in this role.

Roles & Responsibilities – Continuing to gather insight into this role, the primary terms youth council liaisons/advisors used when describing their role were “oversee,” “advise,” “mentor,” “manage,” “coordinate,” “support,” and “facilitate.” Logistical in nature, youth council liaisons/advisors oversee and advise the youth council in various capacities. Regarding the youth council, many liaisons/advisors are involved in *the process of appointing youth council members*. Specifically, they help recruit, sort applications, interview, and select. Once youth council members are appointed, these adults are responsible for also *placing youth into committees and leadership roles*. Regarding *meetings*, youth council liaisons play a coordinator role by identifying meeting space, creating meeting agendas, managing minutes, inviting guest speakers, communicating with youth council members, attending the meetings, and overseeing attendance. Next, whether youth councils receive money through the government or fundraising, liaisons are responsible for “organizing,” “overseeing,” and “managing” the *budget*. Additionally, youth council liaisons assist in coordinating and planning *events* and ensure the safety and well-being of youth council members at such events. Lastly, as adults, they must operationalize their position as a *liaison*, connecting the youth council to various power-holding parties, including guest speakers, the city council, the mayor, schools, and their greater community at large.

Appointment – Because the majority of respondents (55%) indicated they are *city employees*, they stated this role is simply part of their *job description* and *existing duties*. Every other respondent indicated they were appointed because they volunteered to serve in this capacity or “asked to apply.”

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

way they can. For example, one respondent stated, “They need to be able to outsource work to the youth and be supportive and give help only when needed to make sure the youth are successful.” In short, liaisons/advisors should provide guidance, encouragement, and overall support. In other words, as a respondent said, this support should mirror “kind of like a mom .”

Knowledgeable - Next, youth want liaisons/advisors that are “smart,” “knowledgeable,” “experienced,” and a seeker of “wisdom.” For example, one respondent said, “someone who is continuously educating themselves about current issues.” Further, liaisons/advisors should be well-versed with youth-related issues, “Advisors should have knowledge of the issues and challenges that young people face, and should be able to provide relevant information and resources.” Lastly, a respondent spoke the ability to provide well-informed knowledge for future directions of the council, “being able to provide good insight on where and how things should go.”

Organized & Responsible - Given the multi-faceted nature of this role, youth said the liaison/advisor must be organized and responsible. For example, one respondent spoke about the importance of being organized at meetings, “making sure each meeting has a point. Don't drag on meetings because you misplaced a paper or digital file.” In fact, the organization of the liaison/advisor directly impacts the organization of the youth council as one respondent said, without the liaison being organized, “the foundation to the cause wouldn't exist.”

In fact, the organization of the liaison/advisor directly impacts the organization of the youth council as one respondent said, without the liaison being organized, “the foundation to the cause wouldn't exist.”

Social Skills - Next, youth want a liaison/advisor who is “relatable,” “personable,” “outgoing,” “enthusiastic,” fun,” “charismatic,” and “friendly.” According to the youth, these social skills will help in connecting with kids because as one respondent said, “being robotic pushes the youth away.” Another respondent spoke to the importance of relatability, “They should be able to relate to and understand what we are thinking.” However, one respondent said they should be relatable to an extent, “They have to be able to connect with youth without being too cringy. If they are giving a presentation, they also shouldn't talk on and on about how successful their kids have been.” Further, another respondent said this friendly rapport should be balanced, “I think that they should be able to connect with the youth and have fun with them while also being able to be serious and get things done.”

Kind-Spirited - Another top quality identified as important for an advisor/liaison to possess is “kindness.” Youth want a liaison/advisor whose spirit invokes kindness, caring, love, compassion, calmness, and focus. For example, one respondent said, “They should have the ability to maintain calm and focus and be very organized.”

“They should have the ability to maintain calm and focus and be very organized.”

- youth council member

Communication - Next, youth want a liaison/advisor with great communication skills because of the function of their role. For example, one respondent said, “They should have constant communication with all Commissioners. It is also their task to facilitate the function of all initiatives and do any necessary communication between Commissioners and City employees.”

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Flexible & Understanding - A liaison advisor that can be flexible is important because they must be understanding of the youth's schedule and learn how to engage with them in non-traditional ways. For example, a respondent stated, "Advisors should be flexible in their approach to working with young people, adapting their style to suit the needs and preferences of the council members."

Listening Skills - Because the liaison/advisor's role is to support, they must demonstrate active listening skills in an effort to make everyone feel included and necessary. For example, a respondent said, "an overseer must be able to keep their calm and be willing to listen at all times."

Open-Minded - Next, youth need a liaison/advisor that is open-minded, and able to understand the youth's perspective. For example, one respondent stated, "An advisor should be open-minded and receptive to new ideas and perspectives, even if they may differ from their own."

Patience - Given that adults will be guiding youth, this individual must display patience because, as one respondent said, "teenagers can be a handful." To further illustrate this theme, another respondent said, "Advisors must be patient and understanding, as young people may take time to express themselves and may need support in navigating complex issues." Next, another respondent said they must be "Someone who is patient but strict." This balance is necessary because another respondent stated, "they need to be able to work with teens who get distracted talking to friends, kids who are too shy to share ideas, and be someone who makes sure everyone feels noticed."

Respect - Considering power dynamics, a liaison/advisor should be someone that respects youth's voice, ideas, and their position. For example, one respondent said "They need to be willing to treat us like equals but push us to grow and learn as a team."

Trustworthy - Youth need a liaison/advisor that they can trust. In fact, the liaison/advisor should be skilled at establishing trust between themselves and the youth. One respondent spoke to the importance of having a trustworthy liaison/advisor, "Advisors should be trustworthy, creating a safe and confidential environment where young people feel comfortable expressing themselves."

Commitment - Youth want a liaison/advisor that is committed to the council, the youth of the city, and their community at large.

Creative - To keep youth engaged, they would like advisors/liaisons with creative and innovative ideas.

Additional qualities youth council members indicated liaisons/advisors should possess are passion, excitement, and being responsible.

Challenges of Youth Council Liaisons – Youth council advisors/liaisons shared the primary challenges they experience within their role, and each respondent listed various challenges in-depth. This was evident through one youth council liaison stating, "Because there isn't a blueprint on how to do this," being a liaison of a youth council presents various challenges. Thus, respondents listed several common key challenges experienced within their role, including participation and interest, meetings, power dynamics, and more.

The most popular challenge cited amongst youth council liaisons was getting youth council members to actively *participate* in the youth council in general and engage with meetings, projects, and additional activities. Expounding on this challenge of participation, one youth council advisor/

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

liaison stated, “Getting all kids to follow through, especially after we returned to school from remote schooling, was a challenge. Our first groups of Youth Council kids were very committed. Since they couldn't meet in person for so long, the newer group of students didn't have as much of an opportunity to learn the ropes from the older students.” In short, the data revealed many youth council advisors/liaisons experience difficulty keeping their youth council members *focused, engaged, and on track with their various responsibilities.*

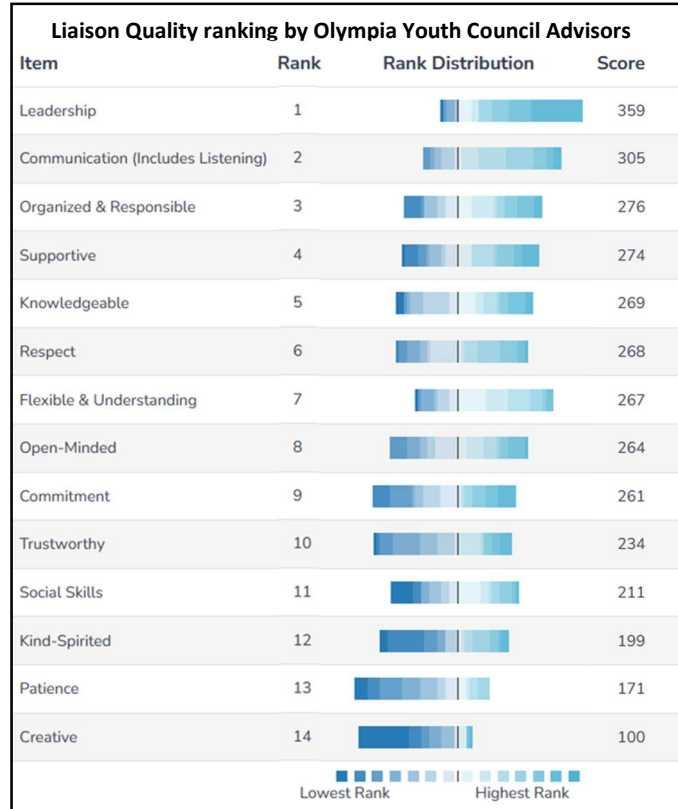
Another core challenge of youth council liaisons is related to *scheduling meetings.* Because youth council members are students with various extracurricular activities and youth council advisors/liaisons also have various responsibilities, time conflicts, and restraints become a relevant challenge to navigate. Similar to scheduling issues, communicating with teens is a major challenge experienced by youth council advisors/liaisons. For example, one respondent stated, “I may send a text message during the day, knowing they are in class, but hope they respond outside of class. Sometimes I think my messages get buried by the end of the day.”

Continuing with major challenges, some youth council liaisons said navigating the power relations between adults and the youth is difficult. In fact, a major part of their role becomes getting adults to understand the value of the youth’s voice. For example, one advisor/liaison said, “The larger struggle is working with adults on not pushing their agendas onto the [youth council] members. Lots of people like to do that, so it is important to serve as a mediator in those situations.” Additional secondary challenges mentioned by youth council liaisons included getting *diverse youth* of the youth council and *staffing.*

LOCAL YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors recommended that Olympia keep in mind the following when selecting a future Olympia Youth Council liaison:

- ✓ Involved in Olympia and experienced working with youth
- ✓ High social skill competency
- ✓ Proficient at leadership and listening
- ✓ Committed to the council’s success
- ✓ Supportive and respectful



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Youth Councils across the United States

This research project aimed to determine how youth councils are constructed, organized, designed, and implemented to provide data-informed best practices and recommendations on how to best organize and seat a youth council for the city of Olympia. In an effort to explore youth council models, this study employed a mixed methods methodology. Through using a case study design, we collected qualitative and quantitative data. City and youth council websites were initially used to gather tangible data on youth councils across the United States of America (USA). Next, surveys were employed to gather insight from youth council advisors/liasons/coordinators/overseers to understand better how youth council models are constructed, organized, designed, and implemented. Through the lens of ethics, utilizing multiple forms of data collection in this study served to triangulate the findings, promoting the trustworthiness and validity of the findings. Through this research, the guiding research question was: *What are the primary ways youth councils are structured, organized, and designed in the USA?* The secondary question was: *How would youth across the USA and in Olympia recommend setting up a youth council?*

Data Collection: Procedures

In February 2023, the researcher began the data collection process by identifying youth councils in the United States to research. As a starting point, the researcher conducted a web search of three phrases, “city youth council,” “city youth commission,” and “city youth committee,” to identify youth councils in the USA. After employing Google searches over a one-week span, the researcher identified 74 youth councils with publicly available data to explore. The researcher recognizes that more than 74 youth councils in the USA exist. However, the scope of the researcher’s search was identifying youth councils with publicly accessible data within one week. Ultimately, these 74 youth councils’ websites were analyzed to extract relevant data regarding how their youth councils are constructed, organized, designed, and implemented. Further, these 74 youth councils were also recruited/invited to complete questionnaires.

Data Collection: Documents

Regarding document analysis, online documents were collected and analyzed to gather tangible insight into fundamental elements of youth council structures. The primary documents selected for analysis consisted of youth council-related content from 74 youth council websites. Eighteen cities studied had populations less than 40k, twenty-one between 40-80k, nine between 80-120k, and twenty-six over 120k. State representation is as follows:

Arizona (3)	Indiana (2)	New York (2)	Pennsylvania (1)	Utah (14)
California (8)	Maryland (2)	North Carolina (4)	South Carolina (1)	Washington (7)
Colorado (4)	Massachusetts (1)	Ohio (2)	South Dakota (2)	West Virginia (1)
Florida (3)	Mississippi (3)	Oklahoma (2)	Tennessee (3)	
Georgia (2)	Nevada (1)	Oregon (1)	Texas (6)	

The researcher thoroughly examined all 74 youth council websites. Each website was assessed page by page to extract relevant materials. Through this 2-week data collection process, 290 documents were used for analysis, including youth council webpages and additional subpages

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

and documents, including youth council application forms, bylaws, and handbooks. These 290 documents consisted of approximately 30,000 words of text, 125 images, figures, charts, and illustrations. Once relevant data was identified, it was placed in the qualitative data analysis software QSR NVivo to prepare for data analysis. The content extracted from websites provided insight into youth council names, mission/purpose/responsibilities, membership, terms, duties, meetings, and the application process.

Data Collection: Questionnaires

Questionnaires were employed to gather widespread data regarding how youth councils across the United States are organized, structured, and implemented. In fact, the researchers created and dispersed two separate surveys with unique purposes (1) youth council overseers/advisors/liaisons and (2) youth council members. The youth council overseer/advisor/liaison survey was designed to gather data regarding the ways youth councils are structured, organized, and maintained, including structural questions on youth council membership, positions, meetings, committees, processes, sustainability, and overall impact. Next, aligning with our human centered approach, the youth council members survey was designed to capture youth council members' first-hand experiences, satisfaction levels, participative outcomes, and perceived best practices.

Both surveys were created collaboratively, using an expert scholar panel, literature review, and insight from Olympia's youth advisors and workgroup. The liaison survey consisted of 30 questions, and the youth survey consisted of 25 questions. Ultimately, both surveys consisted of questions seeking to answer the study's research question: What are the primary ways youth councils are structured, organized, and designed in the USA?

Survey Procedures: Liaisons & Youth

The 74 youth councils analyzed in the document analysis were formally invited by the researcher to participate in this research study by having their liaisons/advisors complete a survey, and encouraging their youth council members to complete a survey. Each youth council that would participate would be placed in a raffle for one of two \$500 grants.

The youth councils that were immediately responsive and agreed to participate were instructed of the first step (*phase 1*), liaisons/advisors completing an online survey. The unresponsive youth councils were sent up to two follow-up emails inviting them to participate in this research project. Through this process, 31 youth council liaisons responded with interest in participating in the study by engaging in step 1, completing the "liaison" survey.

Because this study sought to collect data from youth council members, in which many are minors, the next step (*phase 2*) involved the researcher obtaining informed consent from the parents/guardians of youth council members through an online informed consent form. To do so, the liaison questionnaire provided an opportunity for liaisons to provide parent/guardian contact information so the researcher could email the online informed consent form to them, or the liaisons could opt to be responsible for sending out the online informed consent form to youth council member's parents/guardians. In this, the majority of respondents opted to contact parent/guardians themselves, with only two liaisons providing parent/guardian emails to the researcher.

Once parents/guardians gave permission to their youth to participate in this research by signing the online informed consent form and providing the email addresses of their children, the

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

“youth council member” questionnaire was automatically emailed to their child through the Alchemer platform (*phase 3*). Through this process, 104 youth council members across 15 youth councils completed the “youth council members” questionnaire.

In summation, the questionnaire data collection process included three phases. Procedurally, the researcher first sent the youth council overseers/advisors/liaisons an introductory email with instructions and a link to the “youth council overseer questionnaire.” Next, parental/guardian consent was achieved. Lastly, the youth council members received their survey via email and completed it. In short, *phase 1* was liaisons completing a survey, *phase 2* was parents/guardians giving consent, and in *phase 3* youth council members completing a survey. Ultimately, 31 youth councils were successfully recruited, consisting of 31 overseers completing the liaison survey and 104 youth council members completing the youth council members survey.

Ethics

This research was reviewed and considered ethical by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Temple University. Each youth council, youth council liaison, and youth council member that participated were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. All identifying information will remain confidential to the research team at Truclusion. All document and questionnaire data is stored on the Google Drive password-protected accounts of the researchers at Truclusion.

Because many study participants were minors, ethical considerations were an utmost priority. Before any minors were involved in this study, parents and guardians were provided information on this research project and given an option if their minor could participate or not. Through this process, parents/guardians from 31 youth councils signed the informed consent form, agreeing their child could participate in this research. Additionally, at the beginning of the youth council members questionnaire, the form provided an opportunity for youth council members to give informed assent, signaling the researchers have permission to use their data for research purposes.

Informed consent and assent were achieved by all participants. Before participants provided consent and assent, all details regarding this research project were explained and the option given to discontinue and/or limit their participation at any time. For example, one youth council liaison participated in this study solely by completing the liaison questionnaire because they chose not to involve their youth council members or parents/guardians in the research project.

Data Analysis

Documents

The raw document data extracted from webpages was placed in the data analysis software QSR NVivo to facilitate data analysis. These 270 pages of data were coded into seven major categories including “youth council names,” Mission/Purpose/Responsibilities, Members, Terms, Leadership & Committees, Meetings, Application. This data was analyzed using coding techniques (e.g., structural coding), and statistical techniques (descriptive statistics, sample statistics) in search for the most common and shared meanings within these categories.

Surveys

All survey data was exported from Alchemer into Microsoft Excel and/or NVivo software to facilitate data analysis. However, prior to data analysis, the researcher underwent a process of

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

data cleaning to extract faulty data/respondents with a substantial amount of missing data. Regarding the youth council members survey, 109 youth council members completed it. Regarding the liaison survey, all respondents who only responded to two pages or fewer of the questions were removed. Out of the 45 total responses, 23 fully completed the survey, while 22 partially completed the survey. Further, the researcher found that 15 out of the 22 responses were missing substantial data, while seven were sufficient. In total, 31 responses representing 31 different youth councils was analyzed and represented through the results. The table below details the state and city population of these youth councils.

State	Population 40,000 or less	Population 40,000-80,000	Population 80,000-120,000	Population Over 120,000
Arizona				1
California	1	1		
Colorado			1	
Florida		1		
Georgia	1			
North Carolina		1		
New York		1		
South Carolina		1		
South Dakota		1		
Texas				3
Utah	8	3	1	
Washington	2	1	2	1

All quantitative data were analyzed in Microsoft Excel in search of statistically significant insight. The statistical analysis techniques used were descriptive statistics and confidence intervals. Qualitative data was coded in QSR NVivo using various coding techniques (e.g., structural coding, focused coding) in search for codes, categories, themes, and additional shared meanings (Saldana, 2021). These shared meanings of the ways youth councils are organized, designed, and implemented are presented in the findings.

Website Data

The data found on youth council websites were limited, and varied depending on the youth council. In other words, some youth council websites provided information that others did not. This will be evident in the results as all 74 youth councils are not represented in each category.

Olympia Area Youth

The research team created a potential community engagement pool by asking Olympia youth to complete an application to become an “Olympian Youth Council Advisor,” which included the following questions:

- Where do you attend school, work, and/or other places you spend significant time?
- What do you like about the idea of becoming an Olympia Youth Council Advisor?

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

- Where in Olympia do you live?
- How do you describe your home to friends?
- What is your race?
- What is your gender identification?
- Do you have a disability?
- If there is anything else you would like us to know about you, please share here:

The application was promoted across social media; through twenty-seven community partner youth-serving organizations; through local middle schools, high schools, and colleges; and by posting flyers across Olympia, including restaurants and frequently traveled hubs. Youth who applied that they would be selected to be either “workgroup members” or “panelists.” They were also informed that workgroup members would receive a \$200 stipend and panelists would be entered into a drawing of prizes donated by or for local establishments.

A total of 44 Olympia youth completed the application, of which 26 were selected as workgroup members and 18 as panelists. All 44 were sent either a consent form (for those 18 years or older) or an assent form (for those under 18 years old), which had to be completed prior to any further engagement occurring.

Self-reported demographics of Olympia Youth Council Advisors

Geographical regions represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included Southeast Olympia, Boulevard Heights, Somerset Hill, West Bay, Northwest Olympia, West Olympia, South Olympia, West Olympia, Northeast Olympia, College housing, Downtown, Upper Eastside, Eastside, Southwest Olympia, Cain Road, and Ken Lake.

Schools represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included South Puget Sound Community College, Reeves Middle School, Olympia High School, Capital High School, Tumwater High School, Gravity Learning Center, Evergreen State College, Thurgood Marshall Middle School, Olympia Regional Learning Academy, University of Washington, Bellarmine Preparatory School, and Envision Career Academy.

Extracurricular spaces and activities represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included South Puget Sound Community College Student Life, community performing solo musician, sports outside of school, hanging out with my friends, going outside, speech and debate team, Kiwanis Key Club, National Honors Society, member of YMCA Youth and Government, work at dental office, Tumwater Valley Athletic Club, The Beat Box, robotics club, Budd Bay Café, go to the mall with friends, frequent many local businesses, restaurants, and venues within the community, work on Evergreen State College campus, student government, downtown library, French club, school equity board, work at Chipotle Mexican Grill, work at West Olympia Ross, Panera Bread Retail Associate, Rotary Interact Club, and Cheerleading.

Housing represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included varied from shelter to homes with and without yards to apartments.

Races represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included Pacific Islanders (Guam), Asian, Asian (Filipino), White, Mexican American, White Mexican, Black, Asian Indian, African, Puerto Rican, and Chinese.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

Gender Identity and/or Gender Expression represented by Olympia Youth Council Advisors included female, male, boy, nonbinary, girl, trans-femme, cisgender male, cis woman, demi-girl, androgynous/bi-gender, transgender male, and genderfluid. Pronouns used included “she/her,” “She/Her/Theirs,” “he/him,” “they/them,” “all pronouns”

There was one Olympia Youth Council Advisor who self-identified as having a disability.

Process

The first step was defining what a “successful” youth council means to Olympia youth, and choose which questions should be asked for national research. The Olympia Youth Council Advisors workgroup members met virtually over Zoom. The session, run by youth and Truclusion team members observing, started with an anonymous word cloud prompt “What are you feeling right now?” Then workgroup members were placed into groups and asked to collaborate on Jamboard ideations answering questions such as “What will a successful Olympia Youth Council look like?” The groups brainstormed answers and placed them onto Jamboards. All the answers were then collected into seven primary themes, which helped inform the national survey questions.

Later, after national research concluded, the Olympia Youth Council Advisors participated in two rounds of self-guided surveys in order to share national standard and best practices with them, and see how their—now nationally informed—perspectives and opinions on what is best for Olympia may narrow. The first round of questions did not yet share national results. Those questions were all open-ended text fields asking structural questions such as “How many youth should comprise the youth council,” and strategic questions such as “What strategies can be implemented to ensure the youth council remains sustainable long-term?” The second survey took the answers from the first round and national research results, and asked Olympia Youth Council Advisors to rank ideas, using radio button grids, slider scales, drag and drop ranking, and open text boxes. There were also open text opportunities for Advisors to add context if they chose to.

Truclusion identified 23 items for the Olympia Youth Council Advisors to weigh in on. (The 23 items informed 18 of the 23 recommendations provided in the Recommendations section beginning on page 9.) For each item to be considered, Truclusion drafted a report with the standard practices, best practices, and Olympia Youth Council Advisors feedback. Truclusion next provided the report to City staff for their feedback on legality and feasibility on each item. Truclusion then added City feedback to the report (e.g., for meeting days: “Truclusion thinks that the City will consider any recommendation you choose other than on Tuesdays,” or for meeting modalities: “Truclusion thinks that the City will consider whatever you recommend for this section.”)

The Olympia Youth Council Advisors met collectively to consider each of the 23 items. This hybrid meeting was youth-led and based at Olympia’s City Hall. The Advisors had four different meeting spaces, with each space addressing different items. Advisors moved from space to space as they chose to weigh in on the items they prioritized. There were two voting sessions where all the items which had been discussed in the small spaces were voted on by the entire workgroup. The youth had decided themselves that a 66% supermajority would be needed to forward any recommendation, which was achieved for all 23 items. The supermajority decisions from that July 9 meeting are presented under “Local Youth Recommendations” in the *Results of National and Local Research* section beginning on page 29.

Youth Council Research & Recommendations

for the City of Olympia, Washington

References

- Augsberger, A., Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2018). Engaging Youth in Municipal Government: Moving Toward a Youth-Centric Practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 26(1), 41–62.
- Augsberger, A., Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2017). Best Practices for Youth Engagement in Municipal Government. *National Civic Review*, 106(1), 9–16.
- Augsberger, A., Collins, M. E., Gecker, W., & Dougher, M. (2018). Youth Civic Engagement: Do Youth Councils Reduce or Reinforce Social Inequality? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(2), 187–208.
- Collins, M.E., Augsberger, A., & Gecker, W. (2016). Youth councils in municipal government: Examination of activities, impact and barriers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 65, 140–147.
- Elia Abi-Jaoude, Karline Treurnicht Naylor and Antonio Pignatiello. CMAJ February 10, 2020 192 (6) E136-E141
- Saldana, J. (2021). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications.

Photo Credits

Cover Background: filter adapted from 249717230 © George Dodd | Dreamstime

Illustration Credits

All illustrations, diagrams, charts, and tables © 2023 Truclusion. All rights reserved.



www.truclusion.com