**Mayor's Youth Councils: Connecting Youth to Civic Participation**

Across the country, mayors support youth civic engagement in their communities through Mayor's Youth Councils (MYC). Participating youth gain knowledge about local government and civic engagement, develop leadership and citizenship skills and become equipped to be the community leaders of tomorrow. Mayors gain insight into issues important to youth and can tap into youth energy and perspective to address community-wide areas of concern.

This brief provides an overview of what MYCs look like, key benefits to participating youth and resources to consider when looking to build an MYC for your community.

**What is a Mayor's Youth Council?**

A Mayor's Youth Council is a representative group of high school students who serve as a liaison between youth and local government. While MYCs vary in format, most consist of 8-20 high school juniors and seniors serving for one or two-year terms. MYCs typically meet weekly or monthly, attend City Council meetings and have regular (i.e., quarterly) meetings with the mayor.

MYCs connect youth to civic participation and educate youth about the civic process. Participating youth engage in community and policy issues of city or countywide importance and can provide direct input on government policies and practices that affect young people. MYC participants advise the mayor and his or her administration on issues important to youth and act as a communication link between the mayor and the young people in the community.

### WHAT MYCS DO

- Advise the mayor and his or her administration on issues important to youth.
- Inject the energy, optimism and realism of youth perspective into local government.
- Complete projects that make their city or county a better place to live.
- Survey their peers for youth input on policymaking.
- Connect other youth with underutilized city or county programs.
- Promote the work and programs of the mayor's administration.

### SUCCESSFUL MYCS HAVE

- A defined goal to achieve.
- Regular meetings with the mayor.
- Mentors from outside city or county government.
- Structured MYC alumni networks.
- A mayor who reminds all his or her department heads to use the MYC as a resource.
- A set meeting space and schedule.
- A program to train and develop skills in areas like leadership, community organizing and government policy.
Launching a Mayor's Youth Council

Mayors considering launching a MYC need not start from scratch. Mayors and their staff in cities or counties with MYCs can share their experiences and lessons learned to help guide your first steps.

For example, MYCs typically have an application process to solicit participants. Look to existing MYC applications as a starting point for format and content guidance. In the examples below, questions include those to identify key issues or challenges youth perceive within their communities and how they propose the MYC or the city could address those challenges. Some MYC applications also ask for student resumes, volunteer activity, school performance records and letters of recommendation from community members.

**MYC APPLICATIONS**

- **Jackson, Mississippi**
  The Jackson MYC requires two letters of recommendation from a school administrator, teacher or community leader. The MYC application has four sections: (1) applicant information; (2) a student and parental or guardian pledge to sign; (3) short answer questions; and (4) a short essay. Students receive an application from their high school counselor or city website and return completed applications to the city.
  
  http://www.jacksonms.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3836

- **Nashville, Tennessee**
  Nashville's MYC application collects student information, short answers, parental or guardian permission and two recommendations from a community or school leader familiar with the student's background. Rather than require a recommendation letter, Nashville provides a recommendation form for the reference to describe the applicant. The form includes five questions: (1) In what capacity and how long have you known the applicant?; (2) What would you consider to be the applicant's strengths?; (3) What would you consider to be the applicant's greatest area for improvement?; (4) Give an example of how this candidate takes personal initiative; and (5) Discuss the applicant's ability to effectively communicate with others (peers, adults).
  
  https://www.nashville.gov/Portals/0/SiteContent/MayorsOffice/Youth/MYCApplication2018-19.pdf

- **Chattanooga, Tennessee**
  Chattanooga's MYC uses an online application process. High school juniors and seniors living in the city limits submit application information through a SurveyMonkey tool housed on the MYC website. Acknowledging the time commitment required for MYC participation, the application asks students what other obligations and activities will require their commitment and time during their potential MYC term. The application also includes short answer questions, including, "Describe a time (big or small) when you demonstrated leadership by working with others to create positive change." and, "What specific skill set can you bring to the MYC, and how will you use it?"

  MYC website: https://connect.chattanooga.gov/myc/
  Application link (live only during application process): https://jjfreeman38.wufoo.com/forms/q1ik74sz1t0lapj/
GUIDES AND RESOURCES

Through their Authentic Youth Engagement program, the National League of Cities' (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families has developed materials for mayors considering starting a MYC.

- **Youth Engagement Resources**
  This toolkit provides resources to support efforts at building successful MYCs.
  https://www.nlc.org/resource/starting-a-youth-council

  The resources include:
  
  - **Starting a Youth Council**
    This guide outlines some key first steps and considerations including processes for authorization of, and funding support for, MYCs.
    https://www.nlc.org/resource/starting-a-youth-council
  
  - **Authentic Youth Civic Engagement**
    This strategy guide is designed as a starting point for mayors and staff wanting to actively and authentically bring local youth into the process as real partners at the table.

MYC EXAMPLES

**Boston, Massachusetts**
Boston Mayor Thomas Menino (1993-2014) established a Mayor's Youth Council in 1995 to provide Boston's young people with an active role in addressing youth issues. MYC participants shared existing opportunities within the city with Boston teens and met regularly with Mayor Menino to share their concerns and suggest improvements the city could make in youth-oriented efforts.

The city views benefits of the MYC as increasing voter participation from younger demographics, connecting youth to city government and educating youth about the civic process. Boston's MYC includes youth-led committees with goals to increase youth access and engagement on key issues like education, civic engagement, arts and culture, public health and safety and workforce and economic development. Participant's of Boston's MYC must be entering 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade (or be a comparable age if not currently in school), and they must be a resident of the City of Boston.

**Houston, Texas**
The Houston MYC started in 1998 and is modeled after the city's elected City Council with 22 members representing 11 Council districts and 5 at-large members. High school students in grades 9-12 who reside within the city limits may serve terms on the MYC that begin in the fall after school starts and end in May.

The MYC's mission is to promote civic engagement in youth by providing high school students with opportunities to learn about city government, develop leadership skills and bring awareness to issues that are important to Houston's youth. The MYC is guided by By-laws outlining the mission and purpose of the organization (see Sources).
**MYC Examples**

**Papillion, Nebraska**
The City of Papillion (population 19,539) has a Mayor’s Youth Leadership Council to civically engage and challenge students in grades 7-12. The city works with the MYC to hear the youths' perspectives to help identify solutions to challenges and to build stronger communities. The council meets monthly and serves as a voice for local youth to identify and solve issues they face in the community.

**Pascagoula, Mississippi**
The City of Pascagoula's (population 21,733) MYC provides a forum for 10th - 12th grade students from the city's two high schools to be involved in pertinent issues in the community and municipal government while promoting civic engagement. Pascagoula's MYC terms of membership begin in May and end in April of the following year. The MYC is directed by an Executive Committee consisting of the Mayor, Vice-Mayor, Clerk of Council, City Manager and Sergeant at Arms. The Executive Committee is responsible for leading the meetings and coordinating events and volunteer opportunities. The MYC also consists of Council Committees of youth participants focused on identifying leadership, social, communication and volunteer opportunities.

**Douglas, Georgia**
The MYC in the City of Douglas (population 11,430) helps initiate and foster leadership among youth through education and outreach. The MYC is a nine-member council of high school students advising policymakers on youth issues. The MYC meets twice monthly, with members serving one to four-year terms. The Douglas MYC provides an opportunity for municipal leaders to communicate directly with youth on issues like school violence, underage drinking, peer pressure and community involvement. MYC members support youth initiatives to improve community relations between adults and youth through service projects, youth forums and summits and mentoring opportunities.

**Sources**
- Nashville Mayor’s Youth Council: https://www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Neighborhoods/Youth/Mayors-Youth-Council.aspx
- Chattanooga Mayor’s Youth Council: https://connect.chattanooga.gov/myc/
- Houston Mayor’s Youth Council: http://www.houstonx.gov/myc/
- Houston Mayor’s Youth Council By-laws: https://www.houstonx.gov/myc/myc-bylaws.pdf
- Papillion Mayor’s Youth Leadership Council: https://www.papillion.org/502/Mayors-Youth-Leadership-Council
- Pascagoula Mayor’s Youth Council: https://www.cityofpascagoula.com/DocumentCenter/View/2941/PMYC-General-Information-2019
- Douglas Mayor’s Youth Council: https://www.cityofdouglas.com/DocumentCenter/View/5809