

State Interagency Council (SIAC)/Regional Interagency Council (RIAC)
Transition Age Youth Representative Membership Guidance
A Guide to Support Meaningful Engagement of Young People on Committees

*“**Youth Guided** means that young people have the right to be **empowered, educated**, and given a decision making role in the care of their own lives as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all youth in the community, state and nation. This includes giving young people a **sustainable** voice and then **listening** to that voice. Youth guided organizations create safe environments that enable young people to gain **self-sustainability** in accordance with the cultures and beliefs with which they identify. Further, a youth guided approach recognizes that there is a continuum of **power** that should be shared with young people based on their understanding and maturity in a **strength based change process**.*

*Youth guided organizations recognize that this process should be **fun and worthwhile**.”*

~ Youth MOVE National

PURPOSE: On July 14, 2018, Transition Age Youth membership was formally added to the Regional Interagency Council (RIAC) Membership requirement through the revision of Kentucky Revised Statute - KRS 200:503 and KRS 200:509. This revision updated and aligned these statutes to more fully reflect the System of Care Values and Principles which includes being “youth guided” and ensures that “*youth are full partners in all aspects of the planning and delivery of their own services and in the policies and procedures that govern care for all children and youth in their communities*”. See KRS 200:503 and KRS 200:509 for the revision.

OVERVIEW: Within this document, “youth” or “young person” is defined as an individual between 14-25 years old. Engaging youth effectively requires commitment, compassion, and focused attention from the early planning stages through the life of youth engagement on a committee. Youth engagement can be one of the most rewarding and professionally enriching experiences an agency can have. Youth sharing their experiences and perspectives can only deepen an agency’s understanding of the impact of its work. When youth are brought to the table with decision makers in a meaningful way, they can provide a direct link to how well the agency is addressing the needs of the population it serves. Through engaging young people with lived behavioral health experiences, Kentucky can better identify service access issues, gaps in service delivery, and successful programs, as well as strategies for how to better serve youth to meet its mission.

Please note:

Within this document, “youth”, “young person” or “transition age youth” is defined as an individual between 16-25 years’ old who has a behavioral health disorder and who is receiving or has received a service to address mental health, substance use, or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder.

BENEFITS OF HAVING TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER(S)

The following is from “*Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A Guide to Empowerment*”.

Benefits to the Committee:

- Your committee can gain insight into the youth perspective on issues and on its actions
- Youth can bring new and creative ideas and inject new life into your committee
- It allows your committee to be more inclusive and participatory
- It allows for more buy-in from community youth to participate in your organization or support your positions
- By including youth on your committee, you are making a statement to the community about the importance of youth and about their ability to contribute
- As a result of their interactions with Transition Age Youth committee members, adults on the committee may develop more positive attitudes toward young people
- You can increase the credibility of your group, both among youth and in the community in general, by acting on your principles (From the Community Tool Box).

Benefits for Youth:

- Youth will understand the community in a different way
- Youth will develop new skills and knowledge
- Youth will reframe their personal identities to a leader and change agent
- Youth will see themselves reflected from peers and family members in a positive light
- Youth will develop confidence and strengthen their sense of pride, identity, and self-esteem
- Youth will create a better system that will help themselves and others
- Youth will have their voice heard and utilized

Benefits for Families:

- Youth engagement will help families to see their sibling or child evolve into a leader with competencies and a sense of resilience, belonging, self-advocacy, and independence skills
- Families will view the youth as a model for the family for utilizing mental illness as a strength
- Families will become more strength-based as they see the youth growing and becoming change agents

Benefits for Adult Allies:

- Youth engagement helps adults to experience young people’s competence
- Allies will view youth as legitimate and essential contributors to the organizational decision-making process
- Allies will feel more effective, confident, and competent in their work with youth and the work of youth
- Allies will gain a stronger sense of community connectedness with the youth in the community

Benefits to Organizations: Youth engagement helps organizations to:

- Bring clarity to their mission
- Improve adult staff involvement

- Enhance their responsiveness to the community
- Strengthen their commitment to the work
- Better meet the needs of young people when they understand youth
- Enhance the commitment and energy of adults
- Embed youth involvement principles in the organization practices
- View the importance and benefits of involving a diverse community in decision making
- Generate increased creativity
- Bring underrepresented groups into organizational decision making

Benefits to Planners and Policymakers: Youth involvement helps planners and policymakers to:

- Develop a better understanding of the needs and issues of the youth population they serve
- Gain a different perspective of youth experiences with multisystem involvement
- Develop systems that are more creative and better meet the needs of children and families
- Know what works and does not work based on real world youth experience

Benefits to the Community: Youth involvement helps the community:

- Interact with youth to overcome youth culture stereotypes
- Increase its understanding of how young people view the world
- Identify ways to enhance their community
- Generate fresh and innovative ideas of young people
- Increase community relations
- Increase youth ability to make positive contributions to the community

**If you are ready for youth membership
on your committee,
turn the page!**

Necessary Steps to Meaningful Engagement of Transition Age Youth Members on Committees

The following guidance will support interagency committees in effectively engaging young people as members on committees.

1. PREPARE THE COMMITTEE FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER(S)

- Review the new Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) and the System of Care Values and Principles with the committee
- Provide training to committee members on Youth Culture and Youth Development
- Discuss the use of jargon or acronyms and how that will be managed going forward – some committees have a “no acronym” policy/others provide members with an acronym list
- Discuss the benefits of Transition Age Youth Membership with Committee members (See list above and add your own benefits to this list).
- Discuss the challenges that may come from adding a Transition Age Youth Member and action steps to resolve these challenges with committee members (from The Community Tool Box – University of Kansas):
 - Youth may need preparation with meeting skills. As with some agency members, youth may not have experience with meeting etiquette, rules of order, how to follow the flow of discussion, etc. They may need time, training, and perhaps mentors to educate and prepare them on meeting protocols.
 - Most youth have less formal training and educational background regarding various agency administrative protocols, etc. This can lead to biases or assumptions. Please be patient and provide Transition Age Youth Members with the information they will need to understand the topic at hand.
 - Youth may be hesitant about speaking out. Youth may need encouragement before they feel comfortable in speaking up and feel that their opinions are valued.
 - Youth – even those that are generally quite mature – can be impulsive. It will be helpful for the mentor or adult ally to provide education on effective communication strategies to the Transition Age Youth Member before and after the committee meeting so that the Transition Age Youth Member’s voice can be heard effectively. Agency members may need to be patient and understanding as the Transition Age Youth Member is learning new communication strategies.
 - Incorporating Transition Age Youth Members takes time. Committee meetings may take longer until the Transition Age Youth Member learns the meeting skills and gains the background of knowledge and judgment that will make them true partners.
 - Agency committee members may have to change their assumptions regarding the capabilities of youth on a committee. It may be hard for some adult board members to take Transition Age Youth Members seriously, and that can delay or derail those youth members being able to contribute to the extent that they are able. On the other hand, if those attitudes change, those adults could become advocates for youth abilities in the community, and pave the way for youth taking responsibility in other circumstances as well.
 - While Transition Age Youth Members may be better advocates for the organization or initiative with other youth, they may have less credibility in the community with

adults. Resolving these issues can lead to positive outcomes above and beyond the advantages that youth committee members bring.

2. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN OUTREACH PLAN TO TARGET POTENTIAL TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER CANDIDATES and DETERMINE THE BEST CANDIDATE(S) FOR THE ROLE(S)

- Items for committees to agree on and include in written/online materials:
 - What is the mission and purpose of the committee?
 - What are the goals of the committee?
 - Why is it important for a Transition Age Youth Member be on the committee?
 - What is the role of the Transition Age Youth Member on the committee?
 - What is the motivation for transition age youth to be interested in participating on the committee?
 - What type of stipend/compensation will be provided to the Transition Age Youth Member for preparing for the meeting, attending the meeting, transportation and other expenses such as child-care or having to take a day off of work, etc.?
 - When does the committee meet? Would the committee be willing to change the time of the meeting to better meet the needs of Transition Age Youth Members if needed?
 - What kind of support will be provided to the Transition Age Youth Member? Mentor or adult ally available?
 - How will you advertise for this position? Word of Mouth, internet-social networking sites, targeted marketing; flyer or postcard for agencies, talking with supportive adults, provide information to various local youth councils, plan a lunch and learn at the local high school or college
- Develop an application and application process for potential members. Make sure to consider youth culture, youth language and technology; allow several young people to review the application and provide feedback on language and content before you make it official
- Your committee may want to invite potential candidates to the committee to see how it functions and ask committee members questions about the committee
- Ensure that you consider the following qualities and characteristics for effective Transition Age Youth Member candidates
 - Must be between 16-25 years old (KRS 200.503)
 - Must have a personal lived behavioral health experience which is defined in KRS 200.509 as a behavioral health disorder and receiving or received a service to address a mental health, substance use, or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder
 - Must be willing to be open and share own 'lived' experiences and be comfortable speaking publically with individuals or in groups
 - The individual is willing to learn, has good people skills and is a team player
 - The individual has the ability to network with other youth and speak for the voices of these youth within the community
 - Shows a passion for the work and a genuine empathy and concern for others
 - Is stable in their own recovery process (they feel personal responsibility for their own recovery and are committed to and productive in their own recovery process; they have overcome enough challenges that their recovery process is not going to hold them back from being an advocate for youth)
 - Is able to articulate well the issues of youth and support other youth to have a voice

- Must be comfortable in challenging community partners in a respectful way. The candidate should be comfortable being the voice of youth, for example in pointing out rules or policies that no longer appear to make sense
- The candidate should have completed a formal advocacy training program or event, provided by another source, preferably a peer organization (such as the Family Leadership Academy).

(From Building Bridges Initiative: Peer Youth Advocates in Residential Programs/Kentucky Youth MOVE Council and KY Partners for Youth Transition)

3. PREPARE THE CHOSEN TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER(S) AND ALTERNATE MEMBER(S) BEFORE THE FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING

- Identify an adult mentor, supporter or ally who can empower the Transition Age Youth Member's and Alternate Member's participation on the committee.
- The adult mentor, supporter or ally is someone who can connect with the TAY Member/Alternate Member in between meetings about:
 - Whether the Transition Age Youth Member understands what is going on in the meetings
 - If they feel comfortable speaking up and sharing their voice
 - If the Transition Age Youth Member is troubled, hurt, angered, etc. by anything they are hearing in the meetings
 - Follow up about the stipend
 - Ensure that communication is occurring in a timely and effective manner
 - Teach and empower the Transition Age Youth Member regarding effective communication strategies, follow through with responsibilities and other meeting protocol expectations
 - Review the "Strategic Sharing Workbook" with the Transition Age Youth Member (National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and the Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, 2012)
 - Review the Individual Support Plan with the Transition Age Youth Member (from SAMHSA's Youth Engagement Guidance; page 15)
- Meet with the Transition Age Youth Member and Alternate Member and the identified adult mentor, supporter or ally and provide each with an "Orientation Packet". Discuss and provide:
 - The committee's mission and purpose, etc. as well as the Transition Age Youth Member's role, agenda, audience, location, dates, and options for an adult mentor, supporter or ally
 - Include a clear description of the Transition Age Youth Member's specific role and other expectations
 - A list of names, roles and if possible, pictures of the other members
 - System of Care Values and Principles
 - A one-page summary of the main Robert's Rules of Order used in the meeting/voting expectations
 - Discuss additional expectations related to meeting protocols (cell phone use, side conversations, timeliness, attire, etc.)
 - Discuss the Transition Age Youth Member's preferred method of communication and how meeting dates/locations/cancellations of meetings are communicated/who will be providing that information to all members
 - Optional - Copy of the Youth Engagement Agreement (from SAMHSA's Youth Engagement Guidance; page 12)
 - Answer any questions

- Arrange for the Transition Age Youth Member to attend the Family Leadership Academy if they have not already done so (allow for a stipend if they will be off work or have expenses related to travel/child care)
- Make business cards for them after the first meeting in order to ensure spelling accuracy of name and preferred pronouns
- Remind the Transition Age Youth Member that they may want to bring a notepad/pen for notes or provide a notepad/pen to them
- Discuss details about the stipend such as how much and when it will be provided (it's best to provide it at the meeting; either before or immediately after; cash equivalent card if possible)

4. SUPPORT THE TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER DURING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

- Allow time for Chair or Staff to RIAC to meet with the Transition Age Youth Member a few minutes before the meeting to discuss any questions/provide stipend
- At the initial committee meeting that includes a Transition Age Youth Member or when other new members are introduced, have the Chair review committee's mission, purpose, system of care values, youth guided approach and review the role of the Transition Age Youth Member and any new rules for the meeting (acronyms or jargon)

5. DEBRIEF WITH TRANSITION AGE YOUTH MEMBER AFTER THE COMMITTEE MEETING

- Allow time for the Chair or staff to the committee to debrief with the Transition Age Youth Member and adult mentor, supporter or ally after the meeting
- The adult mentor, supporter or ally can use questions from the Youth Feedback Form (SAMHSA's Youth Engagement Guidance; page 23) to assist in the debriefing process with the Transition Age Youth Member
- Provide ongoing communication with the Transition Age Youth Member(s) and their adult mentor, supporter or ally in order to allow them to be invested in the committee and the process.

Please note: The information contained in this document is an abbreviated version/compilation of the guidance documents listed below in References.

REFERENCES

Peer Youth Advocates in Residential Programs; Building Bridges Initiative (no date).

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