

YOUTH RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TIPS

INTRODUCTION

OK, so you've decided what kind of youth engagement project to do, and now you need the youth! Recruitment is not easy - especially for people who don't work with teens every day - so give yourself enough time to do it right. A well-designed recruitment effort helps avoid the pitfalls of not enough applicants or low retention. There are plenty of youth out there who will jump at these opportunities; you just have to know how to reach them! This guide outlines key suggestions for recruiting youth.

TIPS GALORE:

- **TARGET A CROSS-SECTION OF YOUTH** - When recruiting youth, it is important to market the opportunity to a wide range of students, including those from different ethnic, socio-economic, and academic backgrounds. Try to mirror the diversity of your community.
- **PARTNER WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND SCHOOLS** - Recruit youth through other community organizations, such as schools, churches/mosques/temples, social services providers, parks and recreation departments, elected officials, or even local businesses. Whenever possible, send your information to staff members who work directly with youth. For example, if you are recruiting through schools, don't limit your materials to the principals; include also counselors, teachers, and coordinators of special programs.
- **USE ADULT NOMINATORS** - One way to increase the number of applications you receive, as well as the involvement of supportive adults, is by asking adults to nominate youth. This process pulls in students as well as the organizations with which they are affiliated. In addition, adult nominators often spot students who would be good participants, but who might not necessarily apply on their own. In your adult nomination materials, make sure to discuss what qualities you seek in youth participants including their interests, age, skills or knowledge. Remember to mention the desire for diversity in race, income, and academic performance.
- **REQUIRE YOUTH ESSAY OR APPLICATION**- We recommend coupling your adult nomination with a youth essay or application form so that the youth play an active role in their application process. This requirement should be fun and not intimidating for youth with emerging language skills, who may really benefit from this opportunity. This also gives you a first glimpse at the spirit and motivation of each youth.
- **USE SNAIL AND E-MAIL** - Save your recruitment materials in a format you can easily email (like Word or PDF). You will be glad you did when dozens of people lose the first copy you sent. (Note: emailed applications should not replace flyers or information sent by regular mail. Instead they are just one more tool.)
- **USE YOUTH EDITORS** - Ask a couple of teens to review your recruitment materials before distributing them. They can tell you if the materials are youth-friendly and appealing.
- **CLEARLY DESCRIBE THE PROJECT, EMPHASIZING BENEFITS TO YOUTH** - Make sure your recruitment materials specify the project's goals and expectations in straightforward, youth-friendly language. Explain what your project is, why it is important, and what benefits youth will receive (a chance to make a difference, a stipend, social justice, opportunities to meet elected officials, reference for college applications, etc.). Remember to indicate how many hours a week/month it will take and what level of commitment you expect.

- **CONSIDER OFFERING A STIPEND** - Many youth engagement projects offer modest stipends to participants. Depending on your budget, the stipend could be as small as \$50 a semester or as large as a regular hourly wage. A few reasons to consider offering a stipend include:
 - a. To broaden the economic diversity of your participants (many low-income youth must work, so program stipends give them a way to meet family obligations without flipping burgers);
 - b. To communicate to youth that you value their time, just as you value adults' time;
 - c. To help cover out-of-pocket costs like meals or transportation;
 - d. To make your program more attractive to potential applicants

- **BE PERSISTENT** - Do not be discouraged if you don't immediately get a flood of applications. Expect that you will follow up your recruitment announcements with phone calls to each person on your mailing or email list. Be prepared to resend (electronically or by regular mail) materials as needed.

- **SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE** - Once youth are selected for your project, have each sign a contract agreeing to the terms of the commitment (how long, what hours, youth and adult responsibilities, etc.).

- **PLAN TO RE-RECRUIT** - If your project is ongoing, you will have to replace and retrain youth since participants will graduate or move on to other phases of their lives.