

Tips for Inviting and Preparing Youth for this Listening Session

Youth voice is essential in the Interagency Working Group on Youth Program's (IWGYP) process of developing a strategic plan for federal youth policy. The IWGYP values youth input and ideas, and welcomes youth to participate in all listening sessions. We strongly encourage you to invite youth to listening sessions in your area. The tips below are intended to help you invite and prepare youth for participating in listening sessions.

1. **Offer a personal invitation.** A personal invitation goes a long way in getting youth to participate in listening sessions. If you know of youth you would like to participate, reach out and invite them. Give them a call, send them a text message, connect with their peers, parents, mentors, teachers, or others who can add a personal touch to the invitation.
2. **Get the word out.** Whether or not you are able to offer personalized invitations to youth, it helps to get the word out. Think of this in the same way you would think of any other important invitation you or your organization wanted to share with youth. You may choose any method or combination of methods to get the word out, so long as it gets the job done. Send emails or text messages, distribute invitation flyers, post the invitation to social networking sites, or share the invitation on your organization's website. The key is to do whatever it takes to get the word out so that youth and adults who work with youth can be aware of this opportunity. You may consider partnering with a few youth to help identify creative ways of getting the word out to their peers.
3. **Problem solve with youth.** Even in the best of cases, it is common for some challenges to arise. Transportation, scheduling conflicts, or competing priorities may make it difficult to bring interested youth to the sessions. Support youth in identifying concerns and coming up with pragmatic solutions. Think creatively about ways to bring youth to the listening sessions while addressing barriers. For example, you may explore ride sharing options to address transportation concerns. Or perhaps you can work with students and teachers to explore ways to get school credit for participating in listening session.
4. **Encourage youth to register.** Registering in advance helps the IWGYP ensure that we have adequate space and accommodations. Help make the experience as smooth as possible by having youth register in advance.
5. **Prepare youth.** Once youth have registered for the listening session, they may begin to prepare for participation. Good preparation includes engaging in discussions related to the listening session topic of focus as well as on other matters that impact youth perspectives on programs, services, and policies that make a difference for them and their peers. Here are a few questions to support you in preparing:

- What do young people worry about in your community?
- Where can young people find support when they need it?
- What are the major challenges youth in your community face today?
- What programs really make a difference in the lives of youth? How do you know?
- What programs do *not* help youth?

Good preparation also entails reviewing logistics to make sure that each youth knows how to get to the listening session, is prepared to go through security at federal buildings, and has secured all the permission or support needed in order to participate in the session.

6. **Support youth.** Participating in listening sessions can be intimidating for someone who has not been involved in these sessions before. While some young people are ready to jump in and participate right away, a little support from you can go a long way in helping others to feel comfortable and participate fully. Whenever possible, youth should be supported by mentors who help them frame their feedback, share their perspectives, and address any concerns that may come up.

7. **Continue the dialog.** Participating in listening sessions may spark additional ideas and feedback even after the session is long over. The conversation can continue after the formal listening session comes to an end. Support young people in finding proactive ways to continue the conversation and take action on issues that are important to them. Some ideas for next steps include:

- recreating community listening sessions that welcome youth and other members of the community to participate in the conversation,
- sharing additional ideas and feedback on the strategic plan for youth programming online at www.findyouthinfo.gov. Do not forget to share this opportunity with others, regardless of whether or not they were at the listening session, or
- getting involved with youth programs in your area. Locate federally funded youth programs online at www.findyouthinfo.gov. Click on Maps to find organizations in your area.

We welcome your tips for supporting youth participation in listening sessions. Share your ideas here: <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/provideinput.aspx>.