

HOW TO ESTABLISH A UNITY YOUTH COUNCIL



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WHAT IS A YOUTH COUNCIL?

Native American youth can make a difference, but first they must be organized and prepared for action. An effective way to accomplish this is through a youth council.

A youth council represents a practical way of enabling youth to have a meaningful role in helping solve community problems. Types of youth councils include:

- Tribal Youth Councils
- Alaska Native Village Youth Councils
- Urban Youth Councils
- High School Indian Clubs
- College or University Native American Associations
- A Church-sponsored Youth Group
- An Independent Youth Group

Keep in mind that youth councils are just as diverse as Native America itself. Each youth council maintains its own identity and is built upon the needs and values of that community.

By being involved with a youth council, young Native Americans can use their combined talents and energy to address major concerns facing them today. Youth design and promote their own programs to fit their needs.

Young people who are involved with youth councils learn to accept responsibility. They grow through achievement and in the knowledge that they are making a real contribution to their community and to Native America



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BENEFITS OF JOINING A YOUTH COUNCIL

The benefits youth gain from participating in a youth council depend on what each member puts into the council. If youth make the most of their opportunities they will:

- learn how to work with other young people
- build strong and lasting friendships
- develop greater self-esteem and self-confidence
- develop communication skills
- develop leadership skills
- develop organizational skills
- gain self-worth and inner-strength to battle negative peer pressure
- develop winning attitudes
- learn how to take responsibility for their actions
- contribute to making a difference in Native America.



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WHAT DOES A YOUTH COUNCIL DO?

Each youth council determines its activities based on its own needs. Needs can be identified through discussions with members, interviews, surveys, and other types of research. Once needs are determined, youth councils develop their own action plan to implement their activities.

As affiliates of the UNITY Network, youth councils are expected to conduct activities in community service, cultural heritage, environment, and healthy lifestyles.

For example, UNITY Network affiliated youth councils have:

- volunteered to help the elderly or handicapped
- presented workshops on leadership, peer pressure and school participation
- established a college scholarship
- sponsored youth camps and conferences
- started own business
- sponsored food and clothing drives
- conducted bone marrow tissue typing drive
- sponsored health forums and health career day
- raised money for an infant heart transplant
- purchased Christmas toys for less fortunate children
- sponsored trash clean up days
- participated in beading and craft classes
- sponsored alcohol and drug free dances or skate-a-thons
- raised money for a recreation center
- participated in a governor's page program



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UNITED NATIONAL INDIAN TRIBAL YOUTH

STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A YOUTH COUNCIL

1. Youth decide to organize. They sign a petition or letter indicating their interest in and support for a youth council. Petition or letter is presented to tribe or sponsoring organization such as a school.
2. A steering committee is formed. Steering committee members include youth and adults.
3. Sponsoring organization designates a youth coordinator or advisor. This may be a paid or volunteer position. This individual could be a tribal employee, teacher, parent, or community member.
4. A resolution is drafted and presented to the tribal government or supporting organization for consideration. The resolution is designed to ensure that the youth council is part of the supporting organization's permanent structure. (A sample resolution is included.)
5. The steering committee develops bylaws for the youth council. Keep in mind that the council is tailored to meet the needs of the youth and the values and traditions of the respective tribe or supporting organization. (A sample set of bylaws is included).
6. Youth council bylaws are approved by members and then presented to tribal officials or sponsoring organization members for their approval.
7. An advisory council is formed. Parents, elders, concerned adults, and representatives of youth-serving organizations may be invited to serve. One or two advisors are selected to serve as primary advisors.
8. Elections are conducted for youth council officers.
9. Youth conduct meetings and develop their course of direction.
10. After your youth council is organized, members vote and join the UNITY Network. Copies of youth council bylaws and resolution need to be on file with the UNITY office. Information on joining the Network and affiliation forms are available on the web site at www.unityinc.org.

A resolution should be submitted to and approved by the sponsoring tribe, village or organization. Adapt the following sample resolution to the needs of the organizing group and type on letterhead, fill in the blanks and choose appropriate terms such as reservation, village, or organization. Once the resolution is passed, send a copy to the UNITY office.

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

Constitution - a written instrument embodying the rules of a political or social organization, or in this case, a youth council.

Bylaws - rules adopted by an organization for the governance of its members and regulation of its affairs.

The following constitution and bylaws can be adapted to fit the needs of your youth council. It is highly recommended that the youth discuss and understand the importance of the articles and provisions of their governing documents before they vote to ratify.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS of the

(Name of Youth Council)

ARTICLE ONE Name

The name of this group shall be the _____ Youth Council.

ARTICLE TWO Objectives

The objectives of this group shall be to provide a collective voice and represent the tribal youth in all matters that concern them; to serve as a means of mobilizing and coordinating the actions of youth, other community members and organizations toward positive goals; to promote the development of future tribal leaders; to help solve problems facing tribal youth; to coordinate school and community service projects and provide opportunities for the youth to interact for fun and fellowship.

ARTICLE THREE Members

Section 1: The group shall have one class of youth members consisting of Native American youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age.

Section 2: Each member shall have a right to cast one (1) vote on any matter submitted to a vote of the membership.

ARTICLE FOUR

Officers

Section 1: The officers of the group shall be a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Two or more principal offices may not be held by the same person.

Section 2: The President shall be the principal officer of the group and shall supervise and control the affairs of the group. The President will preside at all membership meetings.

Section 3: In the absence of the President, the Vice President shall perform the duties of the President.

Section 4: The Secretary shall keep minutes of the membership meetings and see that all notices are given in accordance with the bylaws, keep current membership list, and in general, perform all duties related to the office of Secretary.

Section 5: The Treasurer shall have custody and be responsible for the collection and disbursements of all funds of the group. The Treasurer will prepare and present a financial report at each meeting. (An adult advisor shall co-sign all deposits, checks, and financial statements.)

Section 6: The officers shall be elected by ballot at a time and in a manner prescribed by the membership to serve for one year or until removed from office for just cause or until their successors are elected and assume office. The officer's terms shall commence at the close of the meeting at which they are elected.

ARTICLE FIVE

Advisors

Section 1: An Advisory Council will consist of parents, elders, other concerned adults, and representatives of various agencies serving Native American youth.

Section 2: The members of the Advisory Council will help facilitate meetings, offer guidance to youth, chaperone functions and activities of the youth council, and assist youth council members in fulfilling their responsibilities. One (or more) members of the Advisory Council will serve as the primary advisor(s) of the youth council.

Section 3: At least one member of the Advisory Council must be present at all youth council meetings and functions.

ARTICLE SIX

Meetings

Section 1: The youth council membership shall meet a minimum of three times a year. A notice of time, place and agenda will be provided to all voting members at least fifteen days prior to the meeting. These meetings will consist of a business meeting followed by a social or recreational function. The business meeting will include reports from officers and/or special committees. Planning and duties for future business and social functions will be delegated during the business meetings.

Section 2: The presence of eight (8) voting members of the council shall be required to constitute a quorum necessary to conduct the Youth Council's business.

Section 3: All regular and special meetings of the Youth Council shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order and consist of an agenda to include:

1. Roll Call
2. Determination quorum
3. Reading of minutes of previous meeting
4. Reports of Officers
5. Reports of special committees
6. Old business
7. New business
8. Announcements
9. Adjournment

ARTICLE SEVEN

Committees

Committees shall be established by the President from time to time as deemed necessary to carry out the work of the group. The Committee Chairperson will be appointed by the President. The Committee Chairperson will be responsible for appointing others to serve on the Committee. The President shall be a member of all committees.

ARTICLE EIGHT

Affiliation

The youth council will affiliate with the United National Indian Tribal Youth Network, also known as the UNITY Network.

ARTICLE NINE

Amendment of Bylaws

These bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting of the group by a two-thirds vote, providing that the amendment has been submitted in writing at the previous regular meeting.

(This preceding sample is provided to simplify the process of developing a governing constitution and bylaws. However, organizing groups are encouraged to discuss and carefully consider all provisions and ensure they meet the needs of the youth council. Once adopted they should be followed and subjected to frequent review to make sure they provide the governing structure needed for effective youth council operation.)

Please check the UNITY website on a regular basis to view other sections of the Youth Council Handbook, which will follow as they are adapted for posting on the internet.

RESOLUTION

Supporting the Organization of the _____ Youth Council

WHEREAS, the youth of the _____ (reservation/village/organization name) represent a great natural resource, and

WHEREAS, today's youth of the _____ (reservation/village/organization name) will be leaders of tomorrow, and

WHEREAS, the youth need leadership training and experience to better prepare them for these important roles, and

WHEREAS, the youth should be given the opportunity to bring about positive changes in the existing conditions (on the reservation/village or within the community), and

WHEREAS, the young people between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four should have a greater voice in matters concerning them, and

WHEREAS, the youth, through their collective action, can serve as a catalyst to bring about more unity and harmony (on the reservation/village or in the community), and

WHEREAS, there is a need for a mechanism which will allow for the distribution of information, coordination of activities, and sharing of resources, and

WHEREAS, there is a need for interaction and communication among the youth representing the various schools and communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOVLED BY THE (GOVERNING BODY) that the spiritual, mental, physical and social well-being of our youth is of the highest priority.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to provide a greater voice for our youth and to give them greater opportunities to develop as leaders, the (GOVERNING BODY) authorizes the formation of the (youth council name). This organization will operate under the supervision and with the support and encouragement of the (tribe, village, or community name).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the youth council is approved to join the UNITY Network, sponsored by United National Indian Tribal Youth, Inc. to bring about positive change in Native America and to provide youth with greater opportunities to work with other youth leaders throughout the nation.

(The officer who presided at the meeting at which the resolution is passed should sign and date the document to certify its approval.)

Duties of Members

Members:

1. Show respect for other members by being on time and bringing necessary materials to meetings.
2. Accept responsibility of sharing in the business at hand when a meeting convenes. Understand that participation is essential.
3. Try to get other members to express their ideas for the benefit of all, even if it means less time for presenting personal ideas.
4. Give constant, active attention to the group's activity during the meeting.
5. Know the purpose of the meeting and help keep the ideas on track to get things done.
6. Earn the right to give constructive criticism freely by accepting it.
7. Check on assigned responsibilities and receive guidance and authority to carry them out.
8. Accept the responsibility of youth council membership by actively participating in all organized meetings, committees and activities.



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Duties of Officers

President:

1. Before the meeting:

- a) Plans the meeting and prepares the agenda with the help of other officers, committee chairs, and the advisor. He or she includes what is to be accomplished and what is to be achieved. Together they determine the type of meeting and procedure to be used.
- b) Delegates responsibilities.
- c) Checks notifications, reports, and business items.
- d) Organizes meeting place, equipment, etc.
- e) Arrives in the proper frame of mind, knows that planning and preparation are complete.

2. During the meeting:

- a) Calls the meeting to order.
- b) Follows the agenda and addresses items in logical order.
- c) Has a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure and other group techniques.
- d) Organizes and directs the work of committees through a chairperson.
- e) Keeps a favorable climate in the meeting.
- f) Encourages and sets an example in leadership, citizenship, and courtesy.
- g) Listens attentively.
- h) Praises and thanks individuals and groups.
- i) Summarizes and evaluates often.
- j) Makes the meeting the group's meeting.

3. After the meeting:

- a) Evaluates the meeting and the achievements.
- b) Checks reports and minutes.
- c) Sets the machinery in motion for the next meeting.
- d) Reports to and consults with youth council officers and sponsoring organization.
- e) Lists items to be researched.
- f) Checks work of committees.
- g) Follows through on recommendations and actions taken.
- h) Prepares for future activities.
- i) Helps see that the meeting room is put back in order.

Information for this section adapted from the National Association of Secondary Principals

Duties of Officers (Continued)

Vice-President:

1. Has the same requirements and knowledge as the president.
2. Is able and willing to take over for the president
3. Has an important, specific committee activity assignment.
4. Can serve as the most significant leader within the committee structure.

Secretary:

1. Before the meeting:
 - a) Notifies members of the meeting.
 - b) Assists with the preparation of the agenda.
 - c) Has neatly typed minutes of the last meeting.
 - d) Assists various committees in drafting and distributing any correspondence.
2. During the meeting:
 - a) Takes attendance and keeps permanent records.
 - b) Takes complete minutes including name of organization, date, and place of meeting, who presided, old and new business, committee reports, motions, and results.
 - c) Reads minutes from previous meeting.
 - d) Assists the president.

Treasurer:

1. Keeps accurate, complete records of all money collected and spent.
2. Prepares a budget for youth council approval, usually with assistance of a committee and advisor.
3. Presents reports regularly to council and sponsoring organization.
4. Prepares an annual fiscal report.

All Positions:

Duties will be accepted and executed as stated in the bylaws of the youth council.

Duties of Committees

A committee may be appointed, chosen from volunteers, or elected by the members of the entire group. The size of committees may vary according to the project and the scope of work to be accomplished. Smaller groups work more effectively. Five to seven members constitute a workable number. Committees should be large enough to represent a variety of opinions, yet small enough to make meeting schedules possible.

Types of Committees

1. **Standing** Usually elected or appointed for the entire year. Some examples are programs, elections and membership, and social committees. As a Network Affiliate, possible standing committees would be environment, heritage, community service, and healthy lifestyles.
2. **Special:** Appointed for a specific purpose. When the specific purpose is accomplished, the committees may be appointed to investigate or to act for the entire group.
3. **Executive:** Usually composed of officers, chairpersons of committees or an elected board. This group assists in planning meetings and initiating and organizing activities. Reports from this group are compiled by the secretary from the minutes of their meetings.

Committee members should:

1. Understand the purposes of the committee and the methods for achieving and evaluating activities.
2. Share the responsibility with the leader in making the meeting successful.
3. Understand their responsibility in the group and to their constituents.
4. Understand parliamentary procedure and other leadership techniques.
5. Be interested, enthusiastic, and able to honestly follow through with assigned duties.
6. Be willing to place group objectives above personal objectives and can accept the majority position and support it

Committee report should include the following information:

1. Name of the committee, name of chairperson, and names of the members.
2. Date that work began, number of meetings held, and list of supplies with the amount, cost, and where obtained.
3. Committee activities.
4. Evaluation.
5. Committee suggestions.
6. Signature of chairperson or committee spokesperson or secretary.

Duties of Committees

Advisors are key to having effective youth councils. The type of advisor will determine to a great extent the success of the youth council.

To be successful, an advisor must have the respect, trust, and confidence of youth council members as well as of their parents and officials of the sponsoring organization.

An effective advisor is:

Trustworthy	Dedicated and determined
Sensitive	Sociable
Honest	Responsible
Courteous	Persistent and consistent
Patient	Understanding
Respectful	Reliable
A good listener	Open-minded

Advisors assume a variety of roles and responsibilities. They may be a guide, a counselor, a motivator, a promoter, or a coach. However, the advisor's primary role is that of a facilitator.

An advisor must be sure that youth council officers understand their roles and insist that they know how to conduct an effective meeting. Although the primary responsibility for bringing youth council projects and activities to successful completion rests with the youth involved, the advisor will be called upon to supply a great deal of information and guidance.

An advisor takes steps to keep partisan politics out of youth council meetings and activities. They set a positive example by not speaking against elected leaders or officials of the sponsoring organization and insisting youth council leaders do likewise.

Advisors perform other duties including:

1. monitoring funds,
2. filing annual reports to the UNITY office,
3. obtaining medical release forms when youth take trips,
4. serving as liaison between youth and youth council's sponsoring organization, encouraging active participating of each youth council member,
5. encouraging the goals of UNITY,
6. creating opportunities for youth councils, and
7. assuming the responsibilities and duties of a chaperon.

At youth council meetings, advisors should help develop effective relationships among youth.

An advisor should promote communication techniques that make youth council members feel better about themselves, help them express their feelings, and encourage them to talk in a setting which is free from threats or fear, such as a talking circle.

The advisor monitors meetings and activities to ensure that the youth council does not become a clique or an elitist group and to ensure that a few of the members don't dominate every meeting or get all the media attention.

An advisor demonstrates trust. As trust develops among youth council members and the advisor, it is much easier for individual members to learn how their behavior affects the rest of the group and to modify this behavior if necessary or appropriate.

Advisors should always keep in mind that the youth council belongs to the youth. The advisor assists members in every way possible, but the meetings and projects are planned by members. The advisor must not misuse the youth council by pushing their personal agenda upon the members.

The personal conduct of an advisor is extremely important - not only in youth council meetings - but at all times. The advisor is a friend who relates well with youth, but does not try to be a youth. They must know where to "draw the line." The advisor is a role model and one who is entrusted by parents to work with their sons and daughters. The quickest way to destroy a youth council is for an advisor to do something that might violate this trust relationship.

The advisor holds a very challenging position because youth council members will model the leadership they demonstrate. Ultimately, a youth council's success depends greatly on the attitude, commitment, and overall effectiveness of an advisor.

In short, a good advisor serves as:

- Facilitator
- Consultant
- Teacher
- Observer
- Promoter
- Positive
- Role Model

When possible, an advisory council should be formed from representatives of various youth-serving organizations to assist with youth council programs and development.



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UNITY NETWORK CREED

As a member of the UNITY Network,

I accept spirituality as an important foundation for a healthy,
balanced lifestyle;

...recognize that pride in my culture and preservation of my
heritage give me strength and dignity;

...will be honest, understanding and respectful of the diversity and
uniqueness of self, others and our environment;

...know the importance of refraining from the abuse of alcohol,
tobacco and drugs to maintain physical and mental well-being in
order to be a positive role model for present and future
generations, and finally

...make a personal commitment to strive toward reaching my full
potential.



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