



# UNITY Youth Council Handbook



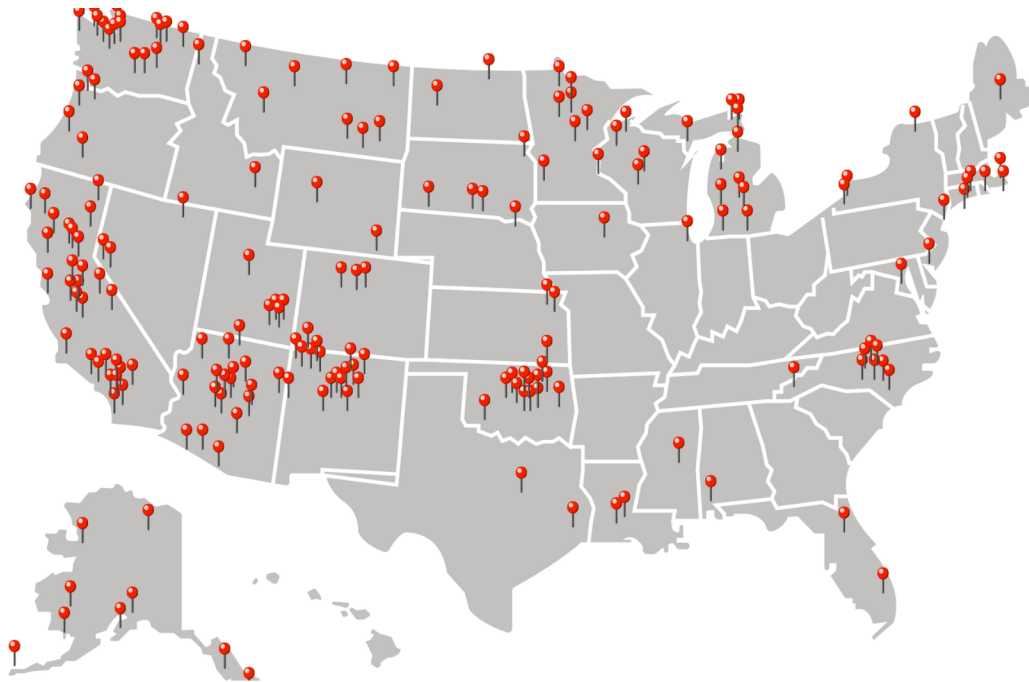
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# The Power of UNITY: Elevating Native Youth for Generations



## Mission

**UNITY's** Mission is to foster the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native youth, and to help build a strong, unified, and self-reliant Native America through greater youth involvement.

## About

- **UNITY:** is a national network organization promoting personal development, citizenship, and leadership among Native American youth.
- **UNITY** has a long (40+ years) and impressive track record of empowering and serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth.
- **UNITY** is well regarded among the nation's Native American organizations, tribal leaders, and government officials.

# Native Youth Councils: Uniting Voices, Leading Change

## What is a Youth Council?

Native American youth have the power to create real change. By coming together, getting organized, and taking action through a youth council, their voices can make a lasting impact. Just like Native communities, every youth council is unique. Each one reflects the values, culture, and needs of the people it serves. Youth councils give Native youth a meaningful role in creating solutions for the challenges their communities face. They are a powerful way to come together, get organized, and make a real impact. 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

By joining a youth council, Native youth combine their talents, energy, and creativity to take action on the issues that matter most to them. From designing programs to leading projects, youth councils give young leaders the tools and support to turn ideas into reality. When you are part of a youth council, you're not just making a difference—you are growing as a leader, accepting responsibility, and strengthening your community and all of Native America.



## Benefits

The more you put into your youth council, the more you'll get out of it! By getting involved and staying active, you can:

- Learn how to work as a team with other Native youth
- Build strong, lasting friendships
- Boost your self-esteem and confidence
- Sharpen your communication skills
- Grow as a leader
- Strengthen your organization and planning skills
- Gain the confidence to stand up to negative peer pressure
- Build a positive, winning attitude
- Make a real difference in your community and across Native America



# Taking Action: How Youth Councils Serve Their Communities

## Role of a Youth Council

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.

UNITY-affiliated youth councils are making a real difference through creative and meaningful projects, such as:

- Volunteering to assist elders and community members with disabilities
- Hosting workshops on leadership, peer pressure, and school involvement
- Establishing college scholarships for fellow students
- Organizing youth camps and leadership conferences
- Launching small businesses to support local needs
- Running food and clothing drives for those in need
- Coordinating bone marrow donor registration events
- Hosting health forums and career exploration days
- Fundraising for critical medical needs, like infant heart transplants
- Providing holiday gifts for children and families in need
- Leading community clean-up and beautification projects
- Sharing culture through beading and traditional craft classes
- Hosting alcohol- and drug-free social events like dances and skate-a-thons
- Raising funds to build or improve recreation centers
- Participating in state leadership programs like governor's page opportunities



# Member Duties



## Member Roles and Contributions

As a valued member of the Youth Council, you are expected to uphold the following responsibilities:

- **Demonstrate Respect** – Show respect for fellow members by arriving on time and bringing necessary materials to meetings.
- **Engage Fully** – Take an active role in discussions and decision-making, recognizing that participation is key to a successful meeting.
- **Encourage Inclusivity** – Support an open exchange of ideas by encouraging others to share their thoughts, even if it means limiting personal speaking time.
- **Stay Focused** – Remain attentive and engaged throughout meetings to contribute effectively to the group's efforts.
- **Align with the Mission** – Understand the meeting's purpose and help maintain focus to achieve meaningful outcomes.
- **Embrace Constructive Feedback** – Be open to giving and receiving feedback with a growth mindset, knowing that improvement comes through shared insights.
- **Follow Through on Responsibilities** – Stay accountable for assigned tasks, seeking guidance when needed and ensuring commitments are fulfilled.
- **Commit to Active Participation** – Honor your role as a Youth Council member by fully engaging in meetings, committees, and activities that strengthen the group's mission.

# Youth Council Officer Responsibilities

## President

### Before the Meeting:

- Plans the meeting and prepares the agenda with input from officers, committee chairs, and the advisor(s).
- Determines the meeting type and procedures.
- Delegates responsibilities.
- Reviews notifications, reports, and business items.
- Organizes the meeting space and necessary equipment.
- Arrives with a prepared and focused mindset.

### During the Meeting:

- Calls the meeting to order.
- Follows the agenda in a logical sequence.
- Demonstrates a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure and group facilitation techniques.
- Organizes and directs committee work through designated chairpersons.
- Maintains a positive and productive meeting atmosphere.
- Encourages participation and exemplifies leadership, citizenship, and courtesy.
- Listens attentively.
- Recognizes and thanks individuals and groups for their contributions.
- Summarizes discussions and evaluates progress.
- Ensures that the meeting remains focused on group objectives.

### After the Meeting:

- Evaluates the meeting and its outcomes.
- Reviews reports and meeting minutes.
- Initiates preparations for the next meeting.
- Communicates with youth council officers and the sponsoring organization.
- Identifies topics requiring further research.
- Oversees committee work.
- Follows up on recommendations and actions taken.
- Plans for upcoming activities.
- Ensures the meeting space is returned to order.





# Youth Council Officer Responsibilities

## Vice President

- Meets the same qualifications and possesses the same knowledge as the President.
- Ready and willing to assume the President's role if needed.
- Holds a key committee assignment.
- Serves as a primary leader within the committee structure.

## Treasurer

### Financial Responsibilities:

- Accurately tracks all funds collected and spent.
- Develops a budget for Youth Council approval (with committee and advisor input).
- Provides regular financial reports to the council and sponsoring organization.
- Prepares an annual financial report.

## Secretary

### Before the Meeting:

- Notifies members about upcoming meetings.
- Helps prepare the agenda.
- Keeps neatly typed minutes from the previous meeting.
- Assists committees in drafting and distributing correspondence.

### During the Meeting:

- Takes attendance and maintains permanent records.
- Records detailed minutes, including:
  - Organization name, date, and location.
  - Presiding officer.
  - Old and new business.
  - Committee reports.
  - Motions and voting results.
- Reads minutes from the last meeting.
- Assists the President as needed.





# Duties of Committees

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A committee may be appointed, selected from volunteers, or elected. Its size should suit the project's needs, balancing diversity of perspectives with efficiency. A group of five to seven members is ideal for effective meetings and decision-making.

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## Types of Committees

- **Standing Committees** – These are typically elected or appointed for a full year and focus on ongoing responsibilities. Examples include program planning, elections, and membership, as well as social committees. As a Network Affiliate, potential standing committees may cover areas such as environment, heritage, community service, and healthy lifestyles.
  - **Special Committees** – Formed for a specific purpose, these committees are appointed to address particular tasks or issues. Once their objective is achieved, they are disbanded. They may be tasked with conducting research, making recommendations, or taking action on behalf of the group.
  - **Executive Committees** – Consisting of officers, committee chairpersons, or an elected board, this group plays a key role in planning meetings, initiating projects, and organizing activities. The secretary compiles reports based on minutes from executive committee meetings to keep the larger group informed.
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## Committee Member Responsibilities

- Understand the committee's purpose, goals, and evaluation methods.
- Actively contribute to productive meetings.
- Fulfill their role and represent their constituents.
- Be familiar with leadership techniques and parliamentary procedures.
- Show commitment, enthusiasm, and reliability.
- Prioritize group objectives over personal interests and support majority decisions

## Committee Report Guidelines

A committee report includes:

- Name of the committee, chairperson, and members.
- Start date, number of meetings, and a list of supplies with costs and sources.
- Summary of committee activities.
- Assessment of progress and outcomes.
- Suggestions for improvement or future actions.
- Signature of the chairperson, spokesperson, or secretary.

# The Role of an Effective Youth Council Advisor

Advisors are crucial to the success of youth councils. The type of advisor greatly influences how effective the youth council will be. To be truly successful, an advisor must gain the respect, trust, and confidence of youth council members, their parents, and the officials of the sponsoring organization. A positive relationship between the advisor and these groups is fundamental to the council's effectiveness and longevity.

Advisors wear many hats, often taking on roles such as guide, counselor, motivator, promoter, and coach. The primary responsibility of an advisor is to be a facilitator. They guide youth council members in their activities while allowing them the autonomy to take leadership roles. Advisors must ensure that youth council officers fully understand their roles and know how to conduct effective meetings. While the youth themselves are primarily responsible for driving projects and activities to completion, advisors provide crucial guidance and information to help them succeed.

Advisors also ensure that the youth council remains neutral and free of partisan politics. They set a positive example by refraining from speaking against elected leaders or officials of the sponsoring organization and encourage youth council leaders to do the same. In this way, the advisor promotes an environment of respect and cooperation.

Advising a youth council is a challenging yet deeply rewarding responsibility. Youth council members will often model the leadership behaviors they observe, meaning that the success of the council is closely tied to the advisor's attitude, commitment, and overall effectiveness. The advisor's leadership sets the tone for the group, and their influence can have a lasting impact on the youth they work with.



## Key Qualities of an Effective Advisor

An effective advisor demonstrates the following qualities:

- Trustworthy and honest
- Respectful and courteous
- Patient and understanding
- Reliable and responsible
- Open-minded and sociable
- A good listener and communicator
- Dedicated, determined, and persistent
- Consistent in guidance and support

# Advisor Tasks and Obligations

## Fostering Positive Relationships and Communication

Advisors should actively promote communication practices that make members feel respected, heard, and encouraged to share their thoughts openly. Creating a space where members can speak freely, using methods like talking circles, helps cultivate respectful and supportive dialogue, free from fear or judgment.

## Personal Conduct and Boundaries

Advisors should be friendly and approachable, while maintaining a professional distance and recognizing the importance of not acting as a peer to the youth. Establishing clear boundaries is key to building a respectful and supportive relationship with all members. As role models, advisors are entrusted by parents to mentor and guide their children. Any actions that undermine this trust can have significant consequences and damage the integrity of the youth council.

## Trust and Independence

Advisors foster an environment of reflection and growth, promoting both personal development and group harmony. While advisors offer support, it is the youth who are responsible for planning meetings and projects, with advisors guiding, not imposing their personal agenda.



## Additional Responsibilities

Advisors also take on additional responsibilities, including:

- Overseeing and monitoring youth council funds.
- Submitting annual reports to the UNITY office.
- Ensuring medical release forms are obtained for youth travel.
- Acting as a liaison between the youth council and its sponsoring organization.
- Encouraging active participation from all youth council members.
- Promoting the goals and mission of UNITY.
- Creating meaningful opportunities for youth councils to grow and engage.
- Fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of a chaperone when needed.



# Establishing a UNITY Affiliated Youth Council

Join UNITY's National Network to promote personal growth, citizenship, and leadership among Native youth ages 14-24! Becoming part of UNITY connects your youth council to a nationwide movement dedicated to empowering young leaders, strengthening cultural identity, and making a lasting difference in Indigenous communities.

Starting a youth council is simple—it only takes three youth! With just a small group, you can begin organizing, creating positive change, and inspiring your peers to take an active role in leadership and community service.

By following these essential steps, youth councils will be well-prepared to complete the necessary requirements for UNITY affiliation, ensuring they are recognized as an official part of the UNITY Network.



## New Member Checklist

- Youth organize by getting a letter of support or resolution from a tribe or sponsoring organization.
- A youth coordinator or advisor is designated by the sponsoring organization.
- A resolution is drafted to make the youth council part of the organization's permanent structure (Sample Resolution Available)
- The steering committee creates youth council bylaws, which are approved by members and then presented to tribal or organizational officials.
- An advisory council is formed, including parents, elders, and adult representatives.
- Elections for youth council officers are held.
- Youth conduct meetings and define their course of direction.
- Once organized, the council votes to join the UNITY Network, and the bylaws and resolution are submitted to UNITY.

Any questions? Please email: [youthprograms@unityinc.org](mailto:youthprograms@unityinc.org)



# 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 RESOLVED 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 presiding officer of the meeting where the resolution is passed should sign and date the document to formally certify its approval.)

# CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

of the

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(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:

- Roll Call
- Determination quorum
- Reading of minutes of previous meeting
- Reports of Officers
- Reports of special committees
- Old business
- New business
- Announcements
- 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.

The following constitution and bylaws are designed to be flexible and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of your youth council. It is strongly recommended that youth council members thoroughly discuss and understand the significance of each article and provision within these governing documents before voting to ratify them.



## 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.*

