

2016-2017 PROGRAM REPORT
Racine County Youth In Governance
Group 3
Prepared by Racine County UW-Extension
August 1, 2017



The Racine County Board of Supervisors created the Youth In Governance program in 2013 to create a model of youth empowerment through direct participation in local government. The overall goal is to bring the youth voice to community issues and concerns while fostering the development of confident, independent, and motivated youth leaders. The Racine County Board partnered with UW-Extension faculty to learn from existing Youth In Governance programs and develop the Racine County model.

Operating Policy

Internal processes, roles, and policy of the Youth in Governance program were developed over a series of Youth In Governance Committee meetings during 2013 and 2014. Oversight for the Youth In Governance program now rests with the Racine County Government Services Committee. The Racine County Youth In Governance Handbook is reviewed annually by the committee and updated by UW-Extension staff. The current handbook is located at: <http://racine.uwex.edu/4-h-youth-development/youth-in-governance/>.

Youth Recruitment

- A nomination process encouraged teachers, coaches, civic leaders, and youth program staff to nominate youth who had demonstrated leadership and an interest in civic engagement. A mailing of information was sent to 19 school contacts on January 5, 2016. County Board members met with school administrators and staff to promote the program and explain the nomination process. Other recruitment efforts included a news release and outreach to youth organizations and home school contacts.
- 89 youth were nominated by 23 nominators. The distribution included 9 in ninth grade, 19 in tenth grade, and 61 in eleventh grade. Nominators were affiliated with Burlington High School, Burlington Catholic Central High School, HALO, Inc., Jerome I. Case High School, John XXIII Educational Center, Union Grove High School, Racine County 4-H, Racine County Sherriff's Office, Racine Family YMCA, State of Wisconsin Public Defender Trial Division Office, St. Catherine's High School, The Prairie School, Walden III Middle and High School, Washington Park High School, and Waterford Union High School.
- All nominees were contacted and required to submit a written application, along with a written recommendation, in order to be considered for interviews. Eighteen youth submitted applications and all were selected for interviews. Interviewed youth participants included 9 females and 9 males. Of the ten youth selected to serve, 6 are females and 4 are males.



Youth In Governance Members (2016-2017)

Back Row: Abram Fabela, Samantha Penzkowski, Hunter Ostergaard, Kealy Marnell, Olivia Spaight
 Front Row: Disheka Moore, Aubrey Novak, Achintya Krishnan, Alice Pennings, David Scholzen

Youth Participants & Mentors by Committee Assignment

Economic Development & Land Use Planning

Youth Participants: Abram Fabela and Alice Pennings
 Mentor: Thomas Roanhouse

Finance & Human Resources

Youth Participants: Achintya Krishnan and David Scholzen
 Mentors: Janet Bernberg and Robert Miller

Government Services

Youth Participants: Kealy Marnell and Aubrey Novak
 Mentors: Kay Buske and Melissa Kaprelian-Becker

Health & Human Development

Youth Participants: Disheka Moore and Olivia Spaight
 Mentors: Mike Dawson and Pamela Zenner-Richards

Public Works, Parks, & Facilities

Youth Participants: Hunter Ostergaard and Samantha Penzkowski
 Mentors: Kiana Harden-Johnson and Scott Maier

Program Impacts

Impacts were measured in the areas of *Civic Engagement* and *Leadership*, both quantitatively and qualitatively, through a retrospective survey that was distributed to the 10 youth. Of those, one completed a partial survey and seven completed the full survey.

Civic Engagement

Participation in the program appears to have impacted the youths' perception of their own knowledge of Racine County government. This is evidenced by an increase in the average value for all of the eight questions related to Civic Engagement. After participation in the program, youth indicated an increase in knowledge of Racine County government and a greater awareness of local issues that affect Racine County. Participants also reported having an increased feeling of usefulness in the role that they play in the community that they live in. Six of the seven respondents, when questioned about the connection they felt to Racine County, prior to their Youth In Governance experience, felt uncertain about or no connection to Racine County. After the completion of the experience, seven of the eight respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they now feel a strong connection to Racine County. Qualitative responses and follow-up discussions indicated that youth felt supported by their mentors, fellow committee members, and the Racine County UW-Extension Office. Responses also indicated that they felt their opinions were respected and encouraged and they felt welcomed.

Leadership

An increase in the average value for all six questions related to Leadership was also seen as a result of participation in the program. The leadership domain that showed the most growth was in being a resource for others in Racine County. Six of the seven youth reported entering the program with "no ability," "some ability," and "unsure" about their ability to be a resource to others. At the conclusion of the program, all seven participants indicated either "some ability," "good ability," or "excellent ability" to be a resource to others in Racine County. Results also indicate that youth further developed their confidence and their ability to share new ideas with others and participate in group discussions with adults. All respondents indicated that after participating in the program, they have either "good" or "excellent" ability in these areas. Eight out of eight survey respondents felt that this experience has prepared them for future leadership opportunities. Many of the youth entered their Youth In Governance role with significant leadership experience and skills. Self-evaluation of their ability to see issues from multiple perspectives, taking responsibility for their decisions, and talk knowledgably about local issues, only increased slightly because these were perceived as existing skills.

WHAT I GAINED

knowledge about local government

better communication skills as well as a greater interest in my community

my new found perspective on the function of local government

and developing my confidence in talking in front of groups

learning how to voice my opinion

how important it is to be responsible

and the importance of being involved in the community

it gave me a great insight into how local government works

responsibility

landownership responsibilities

lessons about respect

the way government is involved in everyday life

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Did the Youth In Governance program create an environment conducive to allowing for youth voice and engagement?

“They always made sure that the youth had a chance to speak and ask questions.”

“The youth’s opinion was both asked for and encouraged in meetings which created a very positive feeling.”

“I was treated as a smart and capable individual by the board supervisors.”

“The Youth In Governance program allowed me to voice my opinions in settings that would strengthen it. This empowered me to do more.”

“It created a conducive environment by being very positive and focusing on cooperation amongst members.”

“The Youth In Governance program gave me a voice about the decisions that would impact my community.”

“The committee members would ask us for our opinions.”

“Youth In Governance allowed the youth in Racine to have a voice and a vote.”

BEFORE Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I was knowledgeable about Racine County government	1	5	-	1	-	2.14
I was aware of local issues that affect Racine County	1	5	1	-	-	2.00
My opinion could make a difference in the community	1	1	4	1	-	2.71
I felt comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages	-	-	2	5	-	3.71
I felt a strong connection to Racine County	-	3	3	1	-	2.71
I had a useful role in the community I live in	-	3	2	1	-	2.67
I was likely to seek other leadership roles	1	-	1	5	-	3.43
I was thinking of a career related to government or public service	2	1	2	2	-	2.57

AFTER Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I am knowledgeable about Racine County government	-	-	-	-	8	4.00
I am aware of local issues that affect Racine County	-	-	-	7	1	4.13
My opinion can make a difference in the community	-	-	1	7	-	3.88
I feel comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages	-	-	1	1	6	4.63
I feel a strong connection to Racine County	-	-	1	6	1	4.00
I have a useful role in the community I live in	-	-	1	6	1	4.00
I am likely to seek other leadership roles	-	-	2	3	3	4.13
I am thinking of a career related to government or public service	1	2	4	-	1	2.75

BEFORE Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I could share new ideas with others	-	1	-	5	1	3.86
I could participate in group discussions with adults	-	-	2	4	1	3.86
I could see issues from multiple perspectives	-	-	1	4	2	4.14
I was confident in taking responsibility for my decisions	-	1	1	3	2	3.86
I could talk knowledgeably with others about local issues	1	1	3	1	1	3.00
I could be a resource to people in Racine County	1	1	4	-	1	2.86

AFTER Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I can share new ideas with others	-	-	-	4	4	4.50
I can participate in group discussions with adults	-	-	-	5	3	4.38
I can see issues from multiple perspectives	-	-	-	5	3	4.38
I am confident in taking responsibility for my decisions	-	-	-	6	2	4.25
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues	-	-	6	1	1	3.38
I can be a resource to people in Racine County	-	-	4	2	1	3.63

“The questions I asked were discussed amongst the committee members and they seemed to truly consider my views.”

LEADERSHIP

Did the Youth In Governance program prepare you for future leadership opportunities?

“Youth in Governance taught me to work collaboratively.”

“It allowed me to grow as a person; to become more mature, more self-sufficient, and more responsible.”

“Youth In Governance provided me with experience in parliamentary procedure and formal leadership.”

“It gave me an insight into what it means to lead. I got a first-hand look at what leaders must do.”

“It helped prepare me by providing me with experience and also improving my effective communication skills.”

“The Youth In Governance program helped me with the ability to make my own decisions and voice my own opinion.”

“I am now a better leader.”

“I am more knowledgeable and able to speak to others about serious topics.”

Outreach Beyond Committee Assignments

When challenged to think about a need in Racine County, this year's Youth In Governance group came up with the idea of further developing the library at the Racine County Juvenile Detention Center. The youth met as a team, developed survey questions for the current residents, and conducted research about what materials would be most appropriate to recommend to the library. Survey results were analyzed and compared to research findings and then recommendations were developed and sent forward to Edward Kamin, Superintendent of the Juvenile Detention Center. Edward communicated that most of the recommendations were implemented. He also commented on how appreciative he was of this project, and more specifically on the high level of quality in the team's recommendations.



Overall Program Recommendations

- Be clear on the time commitment. Three youth representatives indicated that they wish they had known how much of a time commitment this experience would be.
- Community service project expectations should be included in the handbook.
- Review all components of program including the application and screening tools as well as the program participant evaluation to ensure that all components are in alignment with the desired outcomes of the program.
- A formal orientation and on-going support for the mentors should be discussed and developed. Also, consider a mentor evaluation tool to evaluate the program and provide feedback from their perspective.
- Have two other quarterly meetings, in addition to the orientation and tour, which could coincide with a project meeting, to create a space for program participants and mentors to connect.
- The Government Services Committee should continue to make intentional efforts to increase diversity of the participants through expanding the organizations participating in the nomination process.

