



## Racine County Youth in Governance 2018-2019 Program Report (Group 5)

The Racine County Board of Supervisors and University of Wisconsin-Madison, Extension Racine County faculty instituted the Youth in Governance program in 2013 to create a model of youth empowerment through direct participation in local government. Oversight for the Youth in Governance program rests with the Racine County Government Services Committee.

The overall goal of the Youth in Governance program is to bring the youth voice to community issues and concerns while fostering the development of confident, independent, and motivated youth leaders. Teachers, coaches, civic leaders, and youth program staff nominate youth who demonstrate leadership and an interest in civic engagement.



### Youth in Governance Members (2018-2019)

**Back Row:** Achyut Krishnan, Evan Schlicht, Quinn Cafferty, Ethan Evans, Daniel Wan Rosli, and Reagan McKeown;  
**Front Row:** Mackenzie Geschke, Molly Brown, Kaitlyn Faust, May Kohler, Hailey Stoltenberg and Jessie Reschke

## Youth Participants and Mentors by Committee Assignment

### Economic Development and Land Use Planning

Youth Participants: Evan Schlicht and Hailey Stoltenberg

Mentors: Tom Hincz and Thomas Roanhouse

### Finance and Human Resources

Youth Participants: Kaitlyn Faust and Daniel Wan Rosli

Mentors: Brett Nielsen and Robert Miller

### Government Services

Youth Participants: Quinn Cafferty and Jessie Reschke

Mentors: Melissa Kaprelian-Becker and Janet Bernberg

### Health and Human Development

Youth Participants: Ethan Evans and Molly Brown

Mentors: Scott Maier and Kay Buske

### Public Works, Parks, and Facilities

Youth Participants: Mackenzie Geschke and Achyut Krishnan

Mentors: Mike Dawson and Tom Hincz

## Youth Recruitment

- Information about the Youth in Governance program was sent to various school contacts during the month of January 2018. 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.
- Nineteen nominators nominated 91 youth. The distributions included 14 freshman, 16 sophomores, and 61 juniors. Nominators were affiliated with Jerome I. Case High School, Union Grove High School, Racine County 4-H, St. Catherine's High School, The Prairie School, Walden III Middle and High School, Washington Park High School, Extension Racine County, William Horlick High School and Waterford Union High School.
- All nominees were asked to submit a written application in order to be considered for interviews. Twenty-four youth submitted applications and all were selected for interviews. Interviewed youth participants included 13 females and 11 males. Ten youth representatives were selected to serve. Of the ten youth selected to serve, five are females and five are males. Two alternates were selected to serve as well, both are female.

## Program Outcomes

Impacts were measured in the areas of *Civic Engagement* and *Leadership*, both quantitatively and qualitatively, through a retrospective survey that was distributed to nine youth representatives. Of those youth, seven completed the full survey. The indicators in which respondents showed the most growth are summarized and then highlighted on the data charts.

## ***Civic Engagement***

Participation in the program positively impacted the youths' perception of their own knowledge of Racine County government. An increase in the average value for all of the eight questions related to Civic Engagement was experienced. After participation in the program, youth indicated the following.

- An increase in knowledge of Racine County government and a greater awareness of local issues that affect Racine County.
- An increased feeling of usefulness in the role that they play in the community that they live in.
- A strong connection to Racine County.
- Supported by their mentors, fellow committee members, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Extension Racine County Office.
- Their opinions were respected, and they were encouraged to share their thoughts with committee members.
- Youth representatives felt welcomed by supervisors.

## ***Leadership***

Participation in the program positively impacted the youth's perception of their leadership skills. An increase in the average value for all six questions related to Leadership was also experienced as a result of participation in the Youth in Governance program. Youth indicated they grew the most in the following areas.

- Being able to talk knowledgeably with others about local issues in Racine County.
- Being a resource to people in Racine County.
- Participate in group discussions with adults as well as see issues from multiple perspectives.
- 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 sharing new ideas with others, only increased slightly because these were perceived as existing skills.

<b>BEFORE</b> Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I was knowledgeable about Racine County government.	-	3	2	2	-	<b>2.86</b>
I was aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	-	2	2	3	-	3.14
My opinion could make a difference in the community.	-	2	3	2	-	<b>2.71</b>
I felt comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	-	1	2	3	1	3.57
I felt a strong connection to Racine County.	-	4	3	-	-	<b>2.43</b>
I had a useful role in the community I live in.	-	2	3	2	-	3.00
I was likely to seek other leadership roles.	-	1	1	3	2	3.86
I was thinking of a career related to government or public service.	-	3	2	1	1	3.00

<b>AFTER</b> Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I am knowledgeable about Racine County government.	-	-	-	2	5	<b>4.71</b>
I am aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	-	-	-	1	6	4.86
My opinion can make a difference in the community.	-	-	-	3	4	<b>4.57</b>
I feel comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	-	-	-	2	5	4.71
I feel a strong connection to Racine County.	-	-	-	2	5	<b>4.71</b>
I have a useful role in the community I live in.	-	-	1	1	5	4.57
I am likely to seek other leadership roles.	-	-	-	-	7	5.00
I am thinking of a career related to government or public service.	-	-	3	1	3	4.00

## **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

### **How did the Youth in Governance program create an environment conducive to allowing for youth voice and engagement?**

"I felt that my voice and questions were valued greatly by my committee."

"The supervisors were very helpful and friendly, openly answering any questions and addressing us professionally and attentively."

"Everyone on my committee was extremely willing and happy to answer my questions, which made me feel very comfortable."

"I became more comfortable talking to adults about my opinion."

"I was able to provide feedback and a voice to issues/resolutions that affect the community."

"Yes, it did allow youth to have a voice because they were encouraged to ask questions and no question was a dumb question."

"My committee was very welcoming and went above and beyond to make sure that I understood what was happening in the meetings."

BEFORE Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I could share new ideas with others.	-	-	2	3	2	4.00
I could participate in group discussions with adults.	-	-	-	5	2	4.29
I could see issues from multiple perspectives.	-	-	1	2	4	4.43
I was confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	-	-	1	3	3	4.29
I could talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	-	3	2	2	-	<b>2.86</b>
I could be a resource to people in Racine County.	-	3	1	3	-	<b>3.00</b>

AFTER Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I can share new ideas with others.	-	-	1	1	5	4.57
I can participate in group discussions with adults.	-	-	-	-	7	5.00
I can see issues from multiple perspectives.	-	-	-	-	7	5.00
I am confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	-	-	-	2	5	4.71
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	-	-	1	1	5	<b>4.57</b>
I can be a resource to people in Racine County.	-	-	1	1	5	<b>4.57</b>

“I think the most important thing I gained was insight: insight into the issues facing Racine County and insight into how a well-managed committee or project meeting is organized.”

## LEADERSHIP

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

“Youth in Governance taught me how to present my ideas and become more confident in my leadership abilities.”

“I learned how to collect diverse opinions, communicate with others, and discovered new information about government and its people.”

“I became more confident that the Racine Government is listening to the communities’ perspectives.”

“It gave me confidence in voicing my opinion as well as being open to others.”

“The YIG program helped me take a leadership role, which has helped me with my confidence and passion to help others.”

“Youth in Governance gave me opportunities to practice leadership, both by participating as a youth rep on my committee, as well as by collaborating with the rest of the group reps on the project.”

The results below, which probed for change in the civic engagement of the youth, are based on a five-unit scale that included “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “uncertain”, “agree”, and “strongly agree”. Those indicators in which respondents showed the most growth are highlighted.

<b><i>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT</i></b>	# OF YOUTH REPORTING NO CHANGE	# OF YOUTH REPORTING 1 UNIT OF POSITIVE CHANGE	# OF YOUTH REPORTING 2+ UNITS OF POSITIVE CHANGE
I am knowledgeable about Racine County government.	0	3	4
I am aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	0	4	3
My opinion can make a difference in the community.	2	1	4
I feel comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	2	3	2
I have a strong connection to Racine County.	1	3	3
I have a useful role in the community that I live in.	1	2	4
I am likely to seek other leadership roles.	2	3	2
I am thinking of a career related to government or public service.	2	4	1

The results below, which probed for the change in leadership skills of the youth, are based on a five-unit scale that included “no ability”, “some ability”, “unsure”, “good ability”, and “excellent ability”. Those indicators in which respondents showed the most growth are highlighted.

<b><i>LEADERSHIP SKILLS</i></b>	# OF YOUTH REPORTING NO CHANGE	# OF YOUTH REPORTING 1 UNIT OF POSITIVE CHANGE	# OF YOUTH REPORTING 2+ UNITS OF POSITIVE CHANGE
I can share new ideas with others.	3	3	1
I can participate in group discussions with adults.	2	5	0
I can see issues from multiple perspectives.	4	2	1
I am confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	4	3	0
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	0	4	3
I can be a resource to people in Racine County.	0	5	2



## Supportive Environment

The youth felt supported in their role and were particularly grateful to their mentors and committee supervisors. Below are several positive comments youth shared about the supportive environment provided for them during their term of service.

“Supervisor Monte Osterman-He was on my committee. He always found time to explain any confusing proceedings to us youth reps on his committee. He was also a great role model, as he always was positive and fully engaged in the proceedings.”

“Chairman David Cooke-He made sure that we (youth reps) were always given the opportunity to be engaged in the meeting, and like Supervisor Osterman, was always willing to explain difficult concepts. He is also a rock-star chairman!”

“The people who supported me included my mentor who gave me information to better understand projects and he wrote me a letter of recommendation. Also, people on the board helped me by giving me volunteer opportunities.”

“My supervisors (Mr. Demske, Mr. Osterman, Mr. Hincz, etc.) and my YIG mentor (Mrs. Larson). They created a welcoming environment and gave the opportunity to create change.”

“Supervisor Osterman was a role model for me due to his advocacy for the environment, my main area of interest. He explained his role in passing the Farm Bill and introduced me to the area of Environment Policy.”

## 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 educating Racine County youth on the dangers of vaping. In particular, the Youth in Governance representatives wanted to share with middle school students information about the potential harmful effects of vaping. The youth met as a team, conducted research about vaping, created a slideshow presentation, and created a survey. Ten area schools were contacted. Youth presented in three schools. The other schools’ administrators expressed interest and stated how important, and timely, the topic of vaping is currently. However, due to state and local testing constraints, they were unable to dedicate time to the presentation. Students were surveyed after the presentation. They indicated that the information shared with them was valuable. They know more about the

dangers of vaping because of having heard the Youth in Governance representatives’ presentation.

The youth representatives presented to the Racine County Board in May. Supervisors shared with the youth that they were impressed with the information contained in their presentation. Additionally, they stated that the topic is current and there is concern about the potential negative effects of vaping in the community.



## Overall Program Recommendations

Youth and County Supervisors made several recommendations in writing or verbally to the Extension Racine County Positive Youth Development Extension Educator regarding the current Youth in Governance Program.



- Dedicate ample time in orientation about the procedures of formal meetings. It takes time for youth to understand committee meeting procedures.
- Include committee specific governmental terms in the orientation.
- Begin the group project early in the fall since youth are busy in the spring. This will enable the project to be completed sooner than May.
- Stress to youth the importance of asking questions and sharing their thoughts and opinions during committee meetings.
- Discuss and develop a formal orientation and on-going support for the mentors. Also, consider a mentor evaluation tool to evaluate the program and provide feedback from their perspective.
- Have an initial meeting, in addition to the orientation and tour, to create a space for program participants and mentors to connect.
- Continue to make intentional efforts to increase diversity of the participants through expanding the organizations participating in the nomination process.



*Racine County Youth in Governance is a program of Racine County Board of Supervisors in partnership with Extension Racine County.*

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