



Racine County Youth in Governance 2020-2021 Program Report (Group 7)

The Racine County Board of Supervisors and University of Wisconsin-Madison, Extension Racine County faculty launched the Youth in Governance Program in 2013 with the goal 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 main objective of the Youth in Governance Program is to bring 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.

Racine County Youth In Governance

**Economic Development and
Land Use Planning**



Arev Buchaklian

**Finance and
Human Resources**



Riley Niemiec



Zachary Eifert



Madhura
Sathyanarayanan

**Government
Services**



Willow Newell



Sophia Sandoval

**Health and
Human Development**



Sophia
Schoenfeld



Sarah Stone

**Public Works, Parks,
and Facilities**



Robert Barkley,
Jr.



Roselyn Pacheco





Youth in Governance Members (2020-2021)

Youth Participants and Mentors by Committee Assignment

Economic Development and Land Use Planning

Youth Participants: Arev Buchaklian and Riley Niemiec

Mentor: Tom Hincz, Jason Eckman, and Mike Dawson

Finance and Human Resources

Youth Participants: Zachary Eifert and Madhura Sathyanarayanan

Mentors: Robert Miller and Don Trottier

Government Services

Youth Participants: Sophia Sandoval and Willow Newell

Mentors: Melissa Kaprelian and Nick Demske

Health and Human Development

Youth Participants: Sophia Schoenfeld and Sarah Stone

Mentors: Scott Maier and Fabi Maldonado

Public Works, Parks, and Facilities

Youth Participants: Robert Barkley, Jr. and Roselyn Pacheco

Mentors: Tom Kramer and Brett Nielsen

Youth Recruitment

- Information about the Youth in Governance Program was sent to various school contacts during November 2019. County Board members and youth representatives met with school administrators and staff to promote the program and explain the nomination process. Other recruitment efforts included a news release, an article in the Racine Journal Times, and outreach to youth-serving organizations and homeschool contacts.
- Nineteen nominators nominated 64 youth. The distributions included 5 freshman, 27 sophomores, and 32 juniors. Nominators were affiliated with Jerome I. Case High School, William Horlick High School, Washington Park High School, The REAL School, Union Grove High School, St. Catherine's High School, Walden III High School, Waterford Union High School, Racine Lutheran High School, Racine Interfaith Coalition, Union School District-Chief of Schools, Racine Youth Sports, Racine County Library, Racine County Board, Krampitz Academy, and Racine County 4-H.
- All nominees were asked to submit a written application in order to be considered for interviews. Nineteen youth submitted applications and eighteen youth were interviewed. Interviewed youth participants included 10 females and 8 males. Ten youth representatives were selected to serve. Of the ten youth selected to serve, eight are female and two are male. Two alternates were selected to serve as well, both are female. Since one youth decided not to serve her term, one alternate served an entire term.

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 ten youth representatives via email or in-person. Seven youth completed the full survey in person and two youth completed the survey online. The indicators in which respondents showed the most growth are summarized in this report.

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 eight questions related to Civic Engagement was experienced. After participation in the program, youth experienced the most growth in the following.

- An increase in knowledge of Racine County government
- A greater awareness of local issues that affect Racine County.
- More comfortable in group settings of people of mixed ages.
- A useful role in the community in which they live.

Overall, youth representatives felt welcomed and supported by their mentors, fellow committee members, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Extension Racine County Office staff. Additionally, they indicated that their opinions were respected, and they were encouraged to share their thoughts with committee members.

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 experienced as a result of participation in the Youth in Governance Program. Youth indicated they grew most in the following areas.

- Ability to talk knowledgeably with others about local issues in Racine County.
- Being a resource to people in Racine County.
- Taking responsibility for the decision they make.
- All nine youth indicated that the program prepared them for future leadership skills.

Many of the youth entered their Youth in Governance role with leadership experience and skills. Self-evaluation of their ability to see issues from multiple perspectives, participating in group discussions with adults, and sharing new ideas with other increased slightly because these seemingly were perceived as existing skills.

BEFORE Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I was knowledgeable about Racine County government.	1	4	3	1	0	2.44
I was aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	0	3	3	3	0	3.00
My opinion could make a difference in the community.	0	1	2	4	2	3.78
I felt comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	1	1	1	1	5	3.89
I felt a strong connection to Racine County.	0	0	2	4	3	4.11
I had a useful role in the community I live in.	0	2	2	4	1	3.44
I was likely to seek other leadership roles.	0	0	1	3	5	4.44
I was thinking of a career related to government or public service.	1	1	5	1	1	3.00

AFTER Participating in Youth In Gov.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Value
I am knowledgeable about Racine County government.	0	0	0	5	4	4.4
I am aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	0	0	0	7	2	4.22
My opinion can make a difference in the community.	0	0	0	5	5	4.5*
I feel comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	0	0	0	1	8	4.89
I feel a strong connection to Racine County.	0	0	0	2	7	4.78
I have a useful role in the community I live in.	0	0	0	3	6	4.67
I am likely to seek other leadership roles.	0	0	0	1	8	4.89
I am thinking of a career related to government or public service.	0	2	4	0	3	3.44

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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

“We were welcomed by the supervisors and given unlimited time to share our views. Our questions were answered directly and we were encouraged to speak personally.”

“During committee meetings, we were specifically asked and given time to speak. Other supervisors also asked questions, making the environment friendlier to ask questions.”

“It gave youth a non-binding vote in the committees as well as letting (us) speak on issues in the committee meetings.”

“It felt like an incredible opportunity when I first started because I could tell that each one of us had really big leadership qualities. That encouraged me to speak more during our meetings and pick up qualities that they had.”

“They (representatives and supervisors) always asked me about my opinion and if I had any questions.”

*One youth checked more than one box.

BEFORE Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I could share new ideas with others.	0	2	0	3	4	4.00
I could participate in group discussions with adults.	0	1	4	0	4	3.78
I could see issues from multiple perspectives.	0	0	1	4	4	4.33
I was confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	1	0	2	2	4	3.89
I could talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	2	2	1	0	4	3.22
I could be a resource to people in Racine County.	1	3	0	2	3	3.33

AFTER Participating in Youth In Governance	Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability	Average Value
I can share new ideas with others.	0	0	0	3	6	4.67
I can participate in group discussions with adults.	0	0	0	3	6	4.67
I can see issues from multiple perspectives.	0	0	0	4	5	4.56
I am confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	0	0	0	2	7	4.78
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	0	0	2	2	5	4.33
I can be a resource to people in Racine County.	0	0	1	3	5	4.44

“I felt that I was able to expand my skills especially my leadership and responsibility (skills). I feel so much more educated in my city and local government as well as being confident in using my voice.”

LEADERSHIP

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

“You taught us what leadership positions look like.”

“I further strengthened my ability to ask questions and express my ideas.”

“Serving as a YIG representative, I feel better prepared choosing my career path as a lawyer. I feel as though I grew more confident.”

“It gave me connections to run for office, knowledge of terms and encouragement from adults.”

“The Youth in Governance Program opened me up to talking with older people in a productive setting.”

“Before YIG I was really scared to speak up in front of others. Now I feel way more confident in sharing my perspective.”

“I learned to be more comfortable sharing my opinions and standing up for what I believe in.”

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”.

<i>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT</i>	# 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.	1	1	7
I am aware of local issues that affect Racine County.	2	3	4
My opinion can make a difference in the community.	1	6*	2
I feel comfortable in group settings with people of mixed ages.	4	1	3
I have a strong connection to Racine County.	4	4	1
I have a useful role in the community that I live in.	3	3	3
I am likely to seek other leadership roles.	4	3	1
I am thinking of a career related to government or public service.	3	4	1

*One youth checked more than one box.

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”.

<i>LEADERSHIP SKILLS</i>	# 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.	6	1	2
I can participate in group discussions with adults.	4	2	3
I can see issues from multiple perspectives.	7	2	0
I am confident in taking responsibility for my decisions.	4	3	2
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.	4	2	3
I can be a resource to people in Racine County.	3	1	4

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.

“Every single person I’ve met in this experience has been so kind and always asked if I have any questions or needed help.”

“My mentor supported me through my term of service. My mentor helped me understand the meetings and my role.”

“My mentors, Eckman and Dawson, really supported me during the entire process. In the beginning, they reached out to welcome me, share any advice, and offer any help if I needed it.”

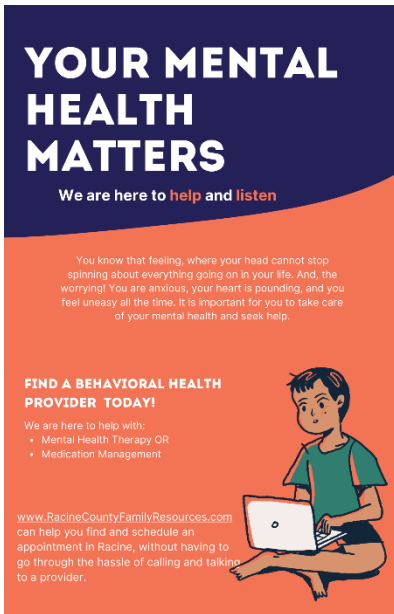
“Chairman Miller-He was always willing to answer any and all of my questions.”

“Chairwoman Kaprelian was welcoming. Supervisor Demske told me about terms. Ms. Larson kept me organized.”

Outreach Beyond Committee Assignments

Each year youth representatives complete one or two group projects during which they hone their leadership and civic engagement skills while they serve residents of Racine County. The 2020-2021 youth representatives decided to create a Youth in Governance sponsored \$250 scholarship. They worked hard securing funding, determining the application and evaluation process, and creating the application and evaluation rubric. Because of their efforts, Abigail Boettcher, a 2021 graduate of Burlington High School, received \$250 towards financing her higher education. Abigail submitted a visual montage and accompanying essay on what she liked about the myriad of Burlington and Racine County community events. All scholarship applicants had to address one of three prompts: 1. What change would you like to see in Racine County and why? 2. What do you see as a current challenge in Racine County? How would you best address the issue? or 3. What do you love most about Racine County and why? The youth representatives presented a summary of their projects to the Racine County Board in May 2021.





Besides the Youth in Governance sponsored scholarship, youth representatives worked with Hollie White, Project Coordinator for the Racine County Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Project to determine how to inform teens and young adults about the Racine County Family Resources website (racinecountyfamilyresources.com). The website is a one-stop resource to help families and youth in search of information and resources related to mental health, medical and behavioral health providers, and interactive tools. After much discussion and consideration, Youth in Governance representatives created social media posts that featured the website and the services available on the site that focused on mental health. They posted the messages they created to their personal social media accounts reaching over 3100 youth thereby increasing traffic to the Racine County Family Resources website as reported by Hollie White.

Overall Program Recommendations

Youth and County Supervisors made a few recommendations to the Extension Racine County Youth Development Extension Educator regarding the current Youth in Governance Program.

- Encourage mentors to contact their Youth in Governance mentee before a meeting to discuss key terms, explain meeting agenda items, and explain confusing topics.
- Have an initial meeting, in addition to the orientation and tour, to create a space for program participants and mentors to connect.
- Involve future Youth in Governance representatives in County Board meetings.



Racine County Youth in Governance is a program of the Racine County Board of Supervisors in partnership with Extension Racine County. An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title VI, Title IX and ADA requirements.