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ABSTRACT
        The publication outlines procedures to insure youth
involvement in planning, operating, monitoring, and evaluating Youth
Development Programs (YDPs) which provide educational, employment,
leadership, and other experiences for disadvantaged youth. The
programs are funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity through
local Community Action Agencies (CAAs). An introduction describes the
purposes of the YDP. Information is presented in two sections which
deal with (1) the development and responsibilites of Youth Councils
and (2) the relationship of Youth Councils to the CAA board and
staff. The first section discusses the following in relation to Youth
Councils: a basic definition, their function, youth involvement and
council development, essential elements, organization, the target
area and Community Youth Councils, and responsibilities. In the
second section, reciprocal benefits of the relationship between Youth
Councils and the CAA Board, maximizing the productivity of the
relationship, and Youth Council representation on the CAA board are
described. (Author/MS)

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

A Technical Assistance Pamphlet

Prepared by

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The opinions expressed herein are those of
the authors and should not be construed as
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I.   INTRODUCTION

Two elements form the basis for the Youth Development Program (YDP) and make it different from other programs funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity through local Community Action Agencies (CAAs).

The first and most important one is youth involvement. Within the Youth Development Program, youth are not passive recipients of pre-packaged programs designed and operated by adults. This means that youth are provided the opportunity to plan, operate, monitor, and evaluate programs developed for their benefit.

The second element is flexibility. The content of YDP activities is limited only by the creativity and resourcefulness of youth and their ability to stimulate support for the YDP within their communities.

The involvement of youth in a broad range of programs with which they identify results from linking these two factors. Growth of youth involvement will increase the relevance and effectiveness of programs. The replacement of token youth participation by real opportunity to form, change, and improve programs will lead to development of positive learning experiences, leadership training and commitment to success.

This educational process of youth development offers poor youth experiences which will:

1. Enable them to deal more effectively with the institutions designed to serve them and their communities.

2. Allow them to better understand such institutions by undergoing the formal decision-making necessary to operate ''their own'' institution.

3. Provide them with increased ability to reach higher potential through acquisition of educational and vocational skills, as well as perspectives for solving problems instead of accepting them.

The appropriate structure through which these experiences will be possible, programs will be developed, and youth involvement will become a reality is the Youth Council.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUTH COUNCILS

A. A Basic Definition and Function of the Youth Council

A Youth Council is the vehicle for youth involvement and decision-making in planning, operating, monitoring, and evaluating youth programs. Its function is to help shape programs to the interests of youth.

Since involvement is not a single, easily definable activity and, in fact, represents the sum of numerous activities experiences and attitudes of youth,

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and since organizing youth simply for the sake of organizing will not formalize nor give credibility to their views and needs, the development of a Youth Council structure is necessary for an effective Youth Development Program.

B.   Youth Involvement and Council Development: The Need for Assistance

It must be recognized that youth do not usually organize themselves into groups such as a Youth Council, nor do they generally recognize the potential of such an organization. Motivating poor youth to take an active, substantive role in Youth Council affairs is likely to be complicated and demanding. Such youth are unaccustomed to act in their own behalf and, as a result, have had little experience in expressing their views. They may be inclined to be apathetic about the Youth Development Program because of their previous inability to influence decisions. Further, the slow process of meaningful institutional development and change, coupled with needs which youth will tend to feel as immediate, will increase the possibility of youth frustration. Responsibility for dealing with these problems and insuring youth development falls on the Community Action Agency which has an obligation to insure meaningful youth involvement in all phases of its activities.

Through positive interaction with youth, the CAA must be prepared to assume a supportive role which will bring about the development of functional, responsible Youth Councils. Youth Councils must have legitimacy. Rubber stamp councils will always be counter-productive and potentially destructive. The CAA's commitment to development of the Youth Council and involvement of youth should be clearly

indicated in its annual grant proposal and supported by adequate financial re-
sources.

C.   The Essential Elements of Youth Councils

The purpose for establishing a Youth Council is to provide a means by which
individual youth, from CAA target areas or neighborhoods, can attain collective
capability to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives. In
order to accomplish this, Youth Councils must be broadly representative of the
youth in a given target area or neighborhood. This means that councils should be
comprised of members of both sexes and all races making up the poverty population.

Since all youth in a given target area neighborhood or community will not
readily be found in one easily identifiable group, flexibility to include the
diversity of an area youth population in the Youth Council membership must be em-
phasized as the council is formed. And, while it may be necessary to organize a
segment of youth in an area to get a Youth Council and program underway, the long
range goal of securing accurate representation of area youth on the Council must
guide the YDP staff and those youth first involved in their efforts to build a
program.

Initially, youth will tend to be inward-looking, concerned with the problems
of day-to-day operation of their council and program. Their first programs may
tend to be simple and, sometimes, relatively superficial. As youth gain experience

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and confidence, they will likely demonstrate a greater concern for development and the operation of more ambitious programs. In a real sense, the process of organizing a program is a program itself. The decision-making, development of leadership, increased confidence, and constructive attitudinal changes may equal the importance of the implemented program activity. For this to happen, the Youth Council must be a fluid, adaptable organization capable of supporting the changing ideas and needs of youth. To do this, the council will be dependent, to a large degree, on the ability of the YDP staff and the CAA to act quickly and responsibly to support changing youth needs and priorities.

D.   Organizing a Youth Council

The importance of the CAA in organizing a Youth Council cannot be overemphasized. Youth do not act in a vacuum. The CAA must initiate affirmative action which will stimulate youth to act and, thereafter, support such youth action. Further, there must be a reason for youth to organize and for the CAA to assist them. Where there is no role for a Youth Council or no funds to support a Youth Development Program, organization often leads to unfulfilled expectations. Where the resources exist, several alternatives are available for the CAA to attempt to stimulate youth organization.

1.   Publicizing Meetings for Selecting Representatives

The CAA may initiate steps to select a representative Youth Council which will set program priorities. Democratic selection does not necessarily mean a

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formal community-wide or target area-wide election. Several alternatives are acceptable under OEO policy, including:

a. Democratic selection at a meeting or conference to which all poor youth are invited.

b. Democratic selection of representatives to a Community Youth Council by members of Target Area Youth Councils who are themselves democratically selected by target area youth.

c. Selection of representatives for membership in Youth Councils by existing organizations whose membership is predominately composed of poor youth.

2. Recognizing an Interim Youth Organization

The CAA can recognize an existing youth organization as the official youth representative body on an interim basis until a more representative group can be formed. However, such a youth group must remain open to other youth in the area who want to participate, and should be instructed, that as a representative organization of the area, it should program for the area as a whole.

3. Committing Funds

The CAA's statement to young people (which is likely to be made through identified youth leadership) that funds and staff support are available for

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a youth program, given certain criteria, may be sufficient to stimulate the active involvement of youth. Care should be exercised, however, to insure that the CAA's resources are not divided so thinly among several potential Youth Development Programs so as to render them all incapable of success. One or two well-supported programs stand a much greater chance of success than numerous programs with sparse support.

4. Identifying Possible Problems or Programs and Resources

CAA staff may work with youth to help them identify their own needs and priorities and the resources which are available from the CAA and the community. This is a traditional "community development" approach to organization, and generally is a lengthy and difficult process with young people.

5. Initiating Programs to Stimulate Youth Interest

Utilizing the input of representative youth leaders or a segment of the youth population, a program of interest to youth may be initiated as a magnet to draw in youth who will ultimately assume greater responsibility for the program through development of a Youth Council.

In summary, any selection process which insures maximum participation of poor youth is potentially acceptable.

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E.   Target Area and Community Youth Councils

It has been said that, if no role exists for a Youth Council and none will be developed, the Council should not exist. This is extremely important in determining the number and type of councils to be involved in a YDP.

The Target Area Youth Council (TAYC) is basic to development of a YDP. It is the organization through which youth are involved in planning, implementing, and assessing their program at the grass-roots, or neighborhood level.

The Community (city, county, multi-county) Youth Council (CYC) represents an organizational layer above that of the TAYC and its functions are not always well understood. Neither CAAs nor youth should emphasize its development until such time as it is needed.

Whenever a Community Youth Council is established, potential liabilities to the total YDP emerge. If, for instance, the CYC is established as a centralized recipient for program funds, care must be taken in defining the role of the CYC. It would be detrimental to the overall YDP effort if the CYC were to compete with the TAYCs and monopolize use of program funds. This would render the TAYCs useless. On the other extreme, if the CYC acts as nothing more than a funnel for funding TAYCs, involving no decision-making and youth leadership, the need for its existence would be questionable.

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In the absence of strong TAYCs, a Community Youth Council may be set up to advise a CAA on priorities for distribution of funds based on the best available representation of Target Area needs. Its first task (and use of CAA funds) may involve the development of decentralized TAYCs in order to improve local program capability and services.

In this context, the positive role of the CYC is, perhaps, best seen as one of being a mediator. As previously mentioned, Target Area groups may compete for funds and resources. Their demands for assistance may well exceed the available supply, especially as regards funds. A CYC should be able to provide overall program perspective in dealing with TAYCs, especially in setting priorities and distributing scarce resources. Further, a CYC should be able to assist CAA youth staff in making known the needs of the CAA to youth as well as the needs of youth to the CAA in seeking a mutually beneficial and supportive CAA/YDF relationship and in developing a strong program.

In summary, if development of the CYC is delayed until TAYCs are reasonably self-sufficient, and proceeds as an extension of the progress and increased capability of youth at the target area level, its necessity and utility will be maximized and the occurrence of problems minimized.

Youth Councils may want to develop and maintain formal relationships with other policy or program groups. A Target Area Youth Council may, for instance, relate directly to an Area Policy Board or a Head Start Project Advisory Committee.

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A TAYC or CYC may link itself to a Mayor's Youth Department, School Board, Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Board, or CAMPS Committee. Such linkages and program extensions may represent a considerable mobilization of local resources in support of the YDP. Consequently, they should be pursued. The important factors to consider when analyzing the advisability of Youth Council interrelationship with other organizations are:

Whether or not the goals of such organizations are compatible to those of the Youth Council, and

Whether or not it is in the best interests of target area community youth to link the Youth Council to other organizations.

F.   Responsibilities of Youth Councils

OEO Instruction 6168-1a defines the three categories within which Youth Councils may undertake activities as planning, operating, and monitoring youth programs. These categories define the nature of youth involvement through a council structure within a YDP, and provide the primary level of Youth Council functions. The corresponding responsibility which a Youth Council must assume is functioning at this level is direct, tangible, and shared with the CAA.

Another characteristic marks Youth Council responsibilities and is related to the fact that the YDP is not the only desirable product of youth involvement. As

previously mentioned in Section I and Part C of this section, development of youth through the process of operating programs is as desirable a product as the programs themselves. The responsibility which the Youth Council must assume to insure such a training experience is less tangible, although still shared with the CAA. The Youth Council, with assistance from staff, adult advisors, and program participants, is responsible for promoting youth development by representing youth, their ideas, needs and priorities to the CAAs and the community at large.

These responsibilities are linked. The Youth Council will be able to grow through the credibility it receives from operating effective programs and more effective programs will result from such growth. Through this mutually beneficial process, the Council will develop into an effective community structure for youth activities, providing meaningful experiences to youth and service to the community.

The responsibility of representing youth and their ideas to the larger community is best undertaken through the base of an effective program. The long range implications of this responsibility will emerge when the Youth Council begins to develop links to other programs which will mobilize additional resources to support the Youth Development Program.

Providing the CAA board of directors with annual youth priorities and advising them on the use of resources carries with it no guarantee that such information and advice will be accepted. The Youth Council is, however, an integral part of

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the CAA structure and its influence within the structure will be measured by its capabilities. Further, the basic responsibility for administration of the Youth Development Program remains with the CAA until such time as youth are able to demonstrate program and fiscal expertise to qualify for delegate agency status. A long-range goal of all CAAs should, however, be to assist established YDPs to attain delegate agency status.

Planning as a responsibility of Youth Councils is important enough to warrant specific discussion. While no Youth Development Program can be effectively developed without planning, it must be remembered that the responsibilities of Youth Councils derive from their constituencies.

Since youth tend to act immediately when seeking to meet their needs through programs, planning cannot be forced upon them. This is re-emphasized by the fluid nature of Youth Councils, which must be initially capable of responding to youth's immediate programmatic impulses. To support council activities in their formative stages, planning must be simple. Planning will become a realistic, functional responsibility of Youth Councils as youth learn the need for it through program and collective experiences. This does not suggest that planning evolves simply as the result of hit-or-miss youth program experiences but, rather, that it not be created as a prerequisite before programs are undertaken. Since planning will be necessary before youth have defined its need and will have to be developed thereafter, the CAA must utilize its planning capability to support Youth Council activities and anticipate youth needs.

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A sense of perspective in the use of CAA planning capability should be maintained, however, as youth begin to develop their own planning abilities. Youth expertise must be supported and encouraged. CAA expertise must not be superimposed upon youth since this might prevent the emergence of increased youth responsibility.

Ultimately, the structuring of planned activities for Youth Councils can give needed direction to both youth leaders and CAA youth staff by providing them with an idea of what is expected of the Youth Council as well as what the Youth Council can expect to accomplish during the program year. A relationship which brings together increased youth responsibility and CAA expertise will enable the council to grow a step at a time, maximizing the effectiveness of the program.

Adequate planning provides youth with ample time to consider various alternatives and to meet deadlines imposed on their activities by the refunding cycle of the CAA. Planned activities provide the Youth Council with the substance to which they can relate their existence as a body. They also give youth a working sense of planning as a mechanism for securing desired results.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF YOUTH COUNCILS TO THE CAA BOARD AND STAFF

A. Reciprocal Benefits of the CAA Youth Council Relationship

Youth Councils do not make decisions on how a CAA can spend its Youth Development Program funds, but they should play a strong advisory role. The require-

ments of having youth involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Youth Development Program means that CAAs cannot operate a program without insuring youth involvement through the vehicle of a Youth Council. The relationship between the CAA and the Youth Council is a reciprocal one: the CAA needs to involve youth through the vehicle of a Youth Council to make a program effective and get youth to participate, and youth need the varied resources of the CAA to help make a program operational.

The CAA has a responsibility to the youth portion of its community, hence the CAA board and staff must be aware of the interests of youth. These interests are best defined through the vehicle of a Youth Council and not through an adult intermediary. A truly representative and functional Youth Council will not only improve the Youth Development Program, but will help the CAA direct its whole program thrust to better serve the community. Youth Councils can help CAAs plan the emphasis of all their youth programming to avoid duplication of effort. Youth Council members can help CAAs recruit participants and perform other functions for other programs. If the Youth Council is seen by the CAA as a very narrow device used solely for the Youth Development Program, then it is not likely to have as great an effect on the community. But if the CAA sees the Youth Council as the means of involving youth deeply in all phases of the CAA's operation, and indirectly in the operation of other agencies and institutions, then constructive communication between youth and the agencies can happen on a broader scale.

B.   How the CAA-Youth Council Relationship Can Be Most Productive

There are several basic principles about the relationship of youth and the CAA that affect its productivity. First, the youth ought to be able to speak directly to the CAA staff and board. The CAA will always be much more impressed by what youth say they want than by what someone else says they want. Second, the CAA staff should tell the youth all the real problems that exist in setting up a program as they come up. The CAA should not ''make things easy'' by hiding real problems. Third, the CAA should recognize that youth who have not had adequate access to all the things they need are often impatient; it should therefore be sure its response to youth is as quick and clear as possible. Fourth, the CAA should be sure that the requirements it places on Youth Development Program proposals are reasonable and necessary.

1. Youth ought to be able to speak directly to the CAA Board and Staff

Youth speaking directly to the CAA does not mean that there should be mass rallies. Rather, it means that there should be as few intermediaries as possible between representatives of the Youth Council and the persons on the CAA Board of Directors that they advise. Putting someone in between can only result in decreasing the credibility of the message delivered and confusing it by passing it through an extra person. The CAA has a genuine interest in being sure that the views expressed are those of the youth; if they come through someone else the CAA will naturally be uncertain of their validity.

The most compelling means of communication for youth is the most direct one; the less direct the communications, the greater the chance for misunderstanding and the more diluted the message.

There are a number of things the CAA can do to encourage direct communication. The Youth Councils could be linked directly to the CAA central management level that has the power to approve, disapprove or seek modifications of a Youth Council idea. All program actions, of course, must be approved by the CAA Board of Directors, including the addition of youth representatives to the Board. But the basic relationship is between the youth groups that are trying to get programs going and the CAA administrators who will, on a day-to-day basis, inform them of what they must do to get a program funded, and guide them on the choice and development of individual programs.

Where there is a sufficiently well-developed network of Target Area Youth Councils to support a Community Youth Council, the Community Youth Council should advise the CAA board on its overall funding and policy decisions.

2. The CAA should make the youth deal with all the real problems that occur in setting up a program

Youth Development Programs place a great importance on the process of youth involvement in developing programs, recognizing that the business of putting the program together and operating it can be as useful an experience for

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youth as the end product of the program is itself useful. The experience of putting a program together should therefore be real, so that it can be valuable for the youth participants. Logistical problems should be wrestled with by the Youth Councils, not resolved for them. Youth will not only benefit from the experience, but will be able to contribute through a fresh viewpoint and an inherent knowledge of some of the resources available to them but not visible to others. Youth, for instance, may already have established a working relationship with someone to get something they want, such as getting a lawyer they know to help them in writing by-laws for their Youth Council. Adult advisors and staff could waste a lot of time trying to identify such a person.

This principle of letting youth work on logistics should extend to the smallest details on any central issue. If insurance is needed for a center or old wiring needs to be repaired before being hooked up, youth should be involved in checking the CAA's insurance coverage and expanding it if necessary. Youth should talk with the power company and ask not only for help (hopefully free), but also for the chance to be around when the wiring is checked, and maybe for the chance to help in fixing the wiring so that they can see how something else is done. This might, for instance, lead to their considering getting into electrician training later in the program's development.

One part of giving the Youth Council is a real and full role in handling the logistical problems and developing a program is dealing with them with the same formality and respect that any other program developer is given.

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Communications should not be so casual that the Youth Council has no means of reminding the CAA or anyone else of what it said at any given time. It is a problem, not a help, for a Youth Council to have nothing to point to when at some later time there is a disagreement about what it wanted or asked for. Written proposals by a Youth Council are helpful to them (unless they are unnecessarily complicated) because they give them something to hold the CAA and others to. Informal communications leave the council at the mercy of the administrator's memories, and reflect less respect for them than for the adult-run groups that have written agreements.

3. CAAs should recognize that youth who have not had adequate access to all the things they need are often impatient, so the CAA's response to them should be as quick and as straight-forward as possible

There are many responsibilities that a CAA has and cannot avoid, such as making sure that the proposed expenditures are allowable. But it must find ways of doing them as quickly as possible if it is to maintain the interest of Youth Councils. This is not only true at the first step (the CAA's reaction to proposals put forth by youth), but also at each stage where assistance is needed in some form from the CAA. A CAA cannot wait until it is asked for something to begin to develop the resources which it needs to respond. It must identify what will be needed far enough ahead of time to have already prepared what is necessary.

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A CAA must therefore identify what it wants in the way of formalities in pro-
posals from Youth Councils, so that afterwards it does not have to raise a
lot of technical questions that make the process too slow. It must be ready
to react to proposals quickly, even if the reaction is only a listing of
further questions for the Youth Council to work on, together with a timetable
for the CAA's response when the questions are worked out.

All of this requires very sophisticated planning by the CAA. It must know
what is going to be needed before it is actually needed, so that it can be
ready. It cannot dodge this responsibility by telling the Youth Councils
that they have to do all the planning. Youth will tend to act first and
recognize the importance of planning later. The CAA will only succeed in
alienating the youth if it asks them to do the technical job of planning
before they have recognized its importance. It is the CAA's responsibility
to plan ahead for technical assistance needs, so this should not be an
additional burden.

At the same time, the CAA's responsibility for doing a great deal of planning
does not mean that it should encourage the Youth Council to avoid planning.
It should encourage planning but do so by starting with the most immediate
planning details. Working on the logistics of setting up a youth center,
for example, could be the first step, and could lead the council into planning
ahead for more sophisticated needs, like providing for staff training. But

this next step cannot be initiated until the Youth Council has had the experience of completing the first step.

4. The CAA should be sure that the requirements that it does impose on Youth Council proposals and similar council actions are all reasonable and clearly necessary

The process of working through them may be educational for the youth, but it should really be necessary or it will teach them that the process may be unworthy of their time.

This rationale should be kept in mind as each thing that the youth are asked to do is reviewed in advance by the CAA. Complicated forms designed to make the CAA's record-keeping system a little easier should be traded off for simpler forms that may encourage more youth involvement. Whenever administrative requirements do arise, they should be fully explained to the councils, so that the youth see how they fit into the total picture, and why each administrative requirement is necessary.

C. YOUTH COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON THE CAA BOARD

A generally accepted goal of the Community Youth Council is to have voting representation on the CAA board. Community Youth Councils might be able to come closer to this goal by:

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1. Asking CAA board members to sit on a joint evaluation committee with Community Youth Council members to review youth proposals prior to submission to the CAA board;

2. getting the CAA to allow members of the Community Youth Council to sit, as voting members, on each of the standing committees of the CAA board;

3. establishing a management training program in which CAA staff train Youth Council members in the tasks of the CAA for the purpose of later hiring them as CAA staff.

4. having Youth Council members sitting as voting members on the CAA's adult neighborhood board, especially in decentralized CAAs.

5. having the president of the Community Youth Council present Youth Development Program proposals to the CAA board instead of the YDP director making that presentation.

6. opening up the jobs that occur around CAAs to YDP participants.

7. establishing a permanent youth subcommittee of the CAA board, if one does not already exist, with the Community Youth Council.

D.   <u>SUMMARY</u>

In the final analysis, youth involvement will work only if the CAA Board of Directors and staff want it to work. Adult members and CAA staff should begin to take youth seriously and recognize their desire to become fully participating members of the community, inexperienced perhaps, but ready to assume their share of the responsibilities and burdens of their community.

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