

# CREATING A SUCCESSFUL YOUTH COURT PROGRAM

**Youth Court 101**





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# Creating A Successful Youth Court Program

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### Section I: Getting Started

Youth courts, teen courts, student courts, and peer courts are widely recognized as effective options for addressing the problem behaviors of juveniles. The number of youth courts in operation has dramatically increased over the last decade due to the unique benefits of these programs. They offer a means for swift and effective interventions at a lower cost per case than most traditional forms of sentencing. They also provide a venue for positive youth development by offering opportunities for young people to accept responsibility for their choices; repair any harm they caused; learn valuable life lessons about decision making, drug and alcohol use, and peer influence; learn about the justice system and court procedures; and perform a service that benefits their community.

The goal of each youth court program depends on the needs of the community and will vary greatly. However, the American Probation and Parole Association, The US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, The National Association of Youth Courts (NAYC), and many existing youth courts have worked together to develop guidelines for developing and operating a youth court. The NAYC maintains a directory of existing youth courts and most programs are more than willing to share their expertise. It can be very helpful to visit existing youth courts, as much can be learned by seeing a court in action. The NAYC website ([www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)), along with the CAYC website ( [www.cal-youthcourts.com](http://www.cal-youthcourts.com) ) contains a wide variety of sample forms that can be downloaded. While each youth court is designed and structured to meet the specific needs of its community, there is a wealth of information and materials that can be used to guide the implementation of a new program. Youth Court 101 is designed to provide an overview of the factors that will impact the success of a youth court program and identify resources that are currently available. More in-depth information is available in the NAYC bylaws and in the manual such as National Youth Court Guidelines and Peer Justice and Youth Empowerment: An Implementation Guide for Teen Court Programs. These can be found on the NAYC website.

### *Community Mobilization*

Critical to the acceptance of any youth court is the buy-in from the key stake-holders in the community, often including the traditional courts, the district attorney's office, the public defender's office, the juvenile probation office, local government, mediation or restorative justice programs, and the schools (administration, counselors, teachers, and extracurricular group leaders). As judges are often the center of legal trends in the community, many programs have found it helpful to become aligned with a local judge. Where possible, establishing an advisory board with representation from each of these groups will improve collaboration and assist in developing policies and guidelines for operation of the program. Some resistance to changing existing systems is to be expected. However, bringing key stakeholders into the development process will improve chances for funding, referrals, and public acceptance.

### *Management and Funding Options*

There may be a temptation when first starting out to create all aspects of the program at once. It is strongly suggested that the first hearing sessions be used to establish a strong foundation for the new program. Beginning with just a few cases involving simple infractions will allow for reflecting on the process and devising improvements. The planned size and structure of the youth court will dictate ongoing staff requirements. Some youth courts employ full-time directors as well as coordinators and/or administrative assistants. While others operate with only one part-time staff member. Many youth courts rely heavily on adult volunteers, allowing for greater coordination with fewer staff members. (Section IV of this guide provides suggestions for recruiting and training volunteers.) Sample job descriptions and typical duties for youth court program staff are available on the NAYC website.

A key decision is whether to operate the program as a 501(c)(3) or to use an existing community agency as a fiscal agent, such as a school, court, or district attorneys office. Again, this decision will be driven by the specific needs of the program, and there are pros and cons for both means of operation.

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Identifying and securing sustainable funding is necessary, of course, and some of those funding sources dictate whether the program must be a non-profit organization or associated with a governmental agency. Examples of funding sources for youth court programs include:

- Federal, state, or private grants
- Budget allocation through local government or school administration
- State or local ordinances designating mandatory alternative sentencing or diversion program fees for moving violations
- DWI prevention funds
- Donations from civic organizations, Bar associations, or law firms
- Fees for participation in youth court

*For further information on community mobilization, staffing, and funding, see Chapters 2 through 4 of National Youth Court Guidelines.*

### *Establishing a Budget*

Even the smallest youth courts must establish a budget and maintain accurate documentation of the time and expenses required to operate the program. Major components to include in a budget are:

- Staff
- Travel
- Training
- Supplies
- Furniture and equipment
- Facilities and court security
- Other expenses such as food for volunteers and promotional materials

*Note that it is important to track volunteer hours and in-kind support, as well.*

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### Resources

#### Community resources

Potential partners (Counseling agencies, mediation centers, schools, juvenile justice commissions, DWI prevention councils)

Advocates (Law enforcement, judges and court administration, DA's office, public defender offices, JPPO's, local government)

Youth (Student government, debate teams, mock trial, Natural Helpers, Key Club, teacher recommendations, youth with prior offenses, faith-based youth groups, home-school groups)

#### State and national resources

Teen Court Associations

OJJDP [www.ojjdp.org](http://www.ojjdp.org)

American Probation and Parole Association [www.appa-net.org](http://www.appa-net.org)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center [www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org)

National Dropout Prevention Center [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

ABA Division for Public Education [www.publiced.abanet.org](http://www.publiced.abanet.org)

Constitutional Rights Foundation [www.crf-usa.org](http://www.crf-usa.org)

Street Law [www.streetlaw.org](http://www.streetlaw.org)

Corporation for National and Community Service [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org)

#### NAYC resources

[www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)

Directory of State Youth Court

Sample forms

Youth court partner links

Trainings and conferences

### Section II

#### *Referral Sources*

Much of a youth court's success hinges on its ability to secure appropriate and adequate numbers of referrals from its referral sources. A first step is working with key stakeholders to determine entities that will be responsible for referring youth to the program. Potential referral sources may be law enforcement, schools, juvenile probation, prosecutor's office, or judges. Referred youth are often called "respondents", "defendants", or "minors". A written policy should outline the respondent population—the types of offenders, offenses, or problem behaviors acceptable for the program and what assessment process will be in place to guide decision-making as to the best type of intervention. The assessment process can help to bring more consistency and facilitate more equal treatment for similarly situated offenders.

The defined respondent population should:

- a. Be governed by any state legislation, regulations or policies that set parameters for types of offenders or issues that can be addressed by youth courts or diversion programs,
- b. Reflect the goals and objectives of the program, and
- c. Have appropriate sentencing options and program services available.

The importance of promoting awareness and understanding of the program cannot be overstated! Maintaining regular contact with referral sources through timely reporting of case outcomes (typically called "dispositions", "consequences", or "sentences"), formal presentations, marketing materials, statistical information, invitations to work with or observe youth court, and services available will reinforce a positive relationship with the referral sources and keep referrals steady.

#### *Types of Offenses*

The goals and objectives for the program should determine the most appropriate types of offenses referred to youth court. State and local laws, school regulations, and/or agency policies that exist may specify what can or cannot be referred to youth court or diversion programs. Complex cases such as truancy should be avoided until the program is experienced and well established.

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Types of Offenses and Percentages of Youth Courts That Accept This Type of Offense	
<b>Theft</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Alcohol</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Disorderly Conduct</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Assault</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Possession of Marijuana</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Tobacco</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Curfew Violations</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>School Disciplinary</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Traffic Violations</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Truancy</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Trespassing</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Criminal Mischief</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Possession of Drug Paraphernalia</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Other Drug Offenses</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Harassment</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Fraud</b>	<b>8%</b>

*Source: National Youth Court Database (October 2006)*

Provisions in state youth court legislation vary considerably from state to state. Youth courts operating in states without enabling legislation often look to state diversion statutes for their authority and guidance. Youth courts must adhere to guidelines set by law, local regulations and agency policies (e.g., policies of referral agencies, juvenile court or school districts).

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### *Referral Process*

A written referral procedure should outline the process the referral source will follow and the type of information that will be provided when a referral is made to the program; who will be responsible for screening referrals; the procedure for sending inappropriate referrals back to the referral source; program practices which ensure that the time between the date of the offense and the youth court hearing is as short as possible; and rules for terminating cases from the program.

The following printed materials will facilitate the process:

- A brochure for the referred youth and parents which details the goals and objectives of the youth court program
- A written consent form for the referred youth and parents to sign which details the requirements for participation
- A referral form which provides all necessary information, including victim or witness contact information

### *The Intake*

To decrease the likelihood of referred youth re-offending, youth courts need to be able to direct them to services with disposition options that address and respond to factors that contributed to the problem behavior. The unique circumstances and backgrounds of each youth should be examined on a case-by-case basis to ensure that an appropriate intervention strategy is taken. Designing disposition options that are based on restorative justice principles gives youth courts choices that they can use to focus their sentences on the reparation of harm and development of needed skills, rather than focusing on punishing for the sake of punishment. Written intake notes will help the youth court to determine a disposition that is based on this concept. The stakeholders and referring sources can assist in determining who will perform the intake process with the referred youth and guardian(s).

The intake process can ensure that the family has a clear understanding of the program, process, and options and that the adequate and appropriate information is gathered to help the youth court determine what sentencing options will best meet the needs for a disposition that is based on restorative justice principle. Some of the confidentiality in typical juvenile proceedings is given up in order to bring peers into the process; some courts require that guardians sign a waiver acknowledging this.

### *The Case File*

The basic components of an individual case file are the referral form, contact information for the respondent, the signed consent form or agreement to participate, the intake notes, the disposition sheet (also known as the youth court sanctions or sentence), and certificates or documentation of completion for particular requirements. Maintaining as much confidentiality as possible is extremely important for juvenile cases, so discretion must be exercised when distributing case information to teens involved in the hearing process.

*For further information on referrals, see Chapter 5 of [National Youth Court Guidelines](#), and sample forms on the NAYC website*

### **Section III: The Hearing**

#### *Adult Judge vs. Peer Judge vs. Peer Jury vs. Tribunal*

There are several main youth court models. Some youth courts use just one model, while others conduct multiple types of hearings depending on the type of case. Many youth courts have an adult judge oversee the courtroom procedure. In this model, youth serve in the roles of defense, prosecution, bailiff, clerk and jurors. Many youth courts have a local attorney or judge oversee the hearing.

The peer judge model uses youth in all the roles in the courtroom. The peer jury model eliminates the need for attorneys and a judge, as the jury acts as questioners of witnesses. A facilitator or bailiff can act in place of the judge to present witnesses and supervise the juror deliberations.

The tribunal model allows three or more youth “judges” to determine the sanctions after hearing recommendations from the defense and prosecution advocates, with no peer jury. The tribunal model can be effective when you have only a small number of volunteers.



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### *Pre-Hearing Process*

It is important to assign roles to the volunteers as far in advance of the hearing as possible. On the date of the hearing, the attorneys and respondent should be asked to arrive early so that a trusting relationship can be established. Remember, this is a strange and new process for the respondent and their guardian(s), and there should be ample time for questions and assurances.

Once everyone has arrived, some preliminary matter should be addressed in the courtroom. The authority figure in the courtroom (judge, bailiff, tribunal judges, or youth court coordinator) should briefly review the hearing process with the respondent. In many youth courts, a confidentiality oath is taken prior to beginning to reassure the respondent that the information discussed will not be shared outside the courtroom setting. The respondent can also be reminded that the youth court process is voluntary and that the choice to proceed is their own.

### *Hearing Process*

Many youth court hearings tend to follow the traditional criminal justice hearing model, and witnesses always including the respondent and sometimes family members or others, are called to present the evidence. When teen attorneys are used, both sides make opening statements and closing arguments, often recommending disposition elements focusing on restorative justice concepts. The jury or tribunal panel deliberates and determines the disposition. Some areas where this process differs based upon the type of model or focus areas for the youth court include:

**Admission of conduct-** Most youth courts require the respondent to admit to their conduct either prior to or at the beginning of the hearing. This makes the hearing essentially a sanctioning or restorative justice process rather than a determination of guilt.

**Prosecution witnesses-** Some youth courts allow victim statements or stipulation to agreed facts in lieu of calling witnesses to testify for the prosecution. This helps to streamline the process and avoid uncomfortable situations. Many youth courts encourage witnesses to testify to clarify complicated facts and/or to provide better understanding of the harm caused by the respondent's actions.

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**Financial restitution-** Some youth courts charge a fee for the respondents participation and/or require the respondent to make Financial amends for the harm caused. Many other youth courts do not have the authority or ability to impose these types of sanctions.

**Unanimous verdict-** Many youth courts require that dispositions of the jury be unanimous prior to their entry to show that the Jury is united in their decision making. Other youth courts, either due to volume or to time restraints, allow for a “majority of the vote” approach. Both approaches benefit from clear jury instructions, thorough explanations of disposition options, and An adult to monitor the jury and assist with answering questions or settling disputes amicably.

**Time for completion of disposition-** This varies significantly based upon the type of practice area a youth court focuses on. For example, a youth court focuses on criminal diversion or probation violations may allow one or two months for a disposition to be completed. Youth courts need to be cognizant of state laws and work with the DA’s office to comply with timelines for filing on juvenile cases (typically one year). A youth court that deals with school rule violations may require a quicker turnaround due to impending court dates or the need for “swift” sanctions. Conversely, truancy cases may also be allowed for a longer period of time for completion to allow for therapeutic processes and changes in patterns of behavior.

### *Jury Instructions*

Usually one jury member is required to serve as jury foreman or presiding juror. After the jury is sworn in, the members are instructed by the judge to listen carefully to the particulars of the case and the recommendations of the defense advocates and prosecution (if applicable). It is important that the jury receives this guidance at every hearing as jury members will vary in experience and ideology. After deliberation, they must agree to the sanctions they feel are right and fair for the respondent. They then return to the courtroom and the jury foreman reads aloud the disposition. In some courts the clerk, bailiff or judge reads the disposition to the respondent.



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### *Post-Disposition*

Immediately upon the conclusion of the hearing, the coordinator or an adult volunteer must make contact with the respondent and their guardian(s). The respondent should receive and sign a copy of the disposition, and should be given a deadline for completion and any required phone numbers such as for community service sites or other agencies conducting required programs. This initial contact will reassure the respondent that youth court supports the outcome and also puts them on notice that they will be monitored throughout the duration of the disposition.

Note: As your youth court settles into its practice area, situations will arise and you may find yourself wondering if your method goes along with the majority. The reality is that it doesn't matter, so long as it works for your system and is consistent with the national training guidelines and the principles of restorative justice.

*For further information on hearings, see Chapter 6 of National Youth Court Guidelines. See sample hearing scripts and disposition sheets on the NAYC website.*



### **Section IV: Policies and Procedures**

#### *Volunteers*

##### **Recruiting**

Developing a team of dedicated volunteers is critical to the success of any youth court program. Depending on what hearing model is being used, teens will need to be recruited and trained to serve as attorneys, peer judges, jurors, bailiffs, and other positions in the court. Adult volunteers can also make hearings and other parts of the program run more smoothly. It can be helpful to work to ensure that the volunteers reflect the diversity in the community, depending on the demographics of the area.

Following are some suggested ways to make contacts in the community and solicit volunteers:

##### Recruiting teen volunteers:

- School classroom presentations
- Articles in the newspaper
- Former defendants
- Bring-a-Friend-to-Court-Day
- Civic organization presentations (i.e. Boys & Girls Club, Boy Scouts, Police Explorer posts, 4-H)
- Mock trials
- Teacher recommendations

##### Recruiting adult volunteers:

- Volunteer websites (i.e. Volunteer Match, local volunteers center)
- Court employees
- Bar associations (i.e. state, local, young lawyers division)
- Phi Alpha Delta, national law fraternity
- College and law school students
- Parents of youth participants
- Civic organization presentations (i.e. Rotary, Optimist International, Kiwanis)
- Military personnel from a nearby base

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Once there is a team of volunteers in place, adults as well as teens, they can also be asked to help recruit for your program on an ongoing basis. Word of mouth is the best recruiting tool.

### Training

- Use multiple learning techniques (written, oral, visual)
- Include legal professionals and students whenever possible
- Create a training curriculum to standardize your training
- Create a training manual that volunteers can refer back to after completing training
- Modify trainings for each role, i.e. different trainings for jurors, teen attorneys, and adult volunteers
- Ensure volunteers understand the time commitment of each role, e.g. twice a month for one year
- Provide an opportunity for volunteers to practice

### Retaining

Clear expectations should be established for the commitment expected from volunteers. Standardized court days, times, and locations, and a posted schedule for the entire year or school calendar are helpful. Policies for volunteers should answer the following questions:

How will information be disseminated (email, mail, phone)?

What is the preferred method for them to communicate with you?

When is the notification deadline to volunteer (week before court, day before, day of)?

The time of volunteers is valuable and should be respected. Advance sign-ups for attorney, jury, and other positions will help ensure that the youth court is not shorthanded, but also that there are not volunteers without a job to do. The following can be used to recognize volunteer's contributions to both the program and the community:

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- Awards (certificates, pins, plaques)
- Promotional items (gavels, bags, t-shirts)
- Food
- Fun events to socialize outside of courts (movies, meals, field trips)
- Professional development- opportunities to learn more about the law through visits to local courts or detention centers, and guest speakers such as judges, attorneys, victim advocates
- Gift certificates
- Thank you notes

***Volunteers will continue to contribute only if they feel useful and appreciated***

*For more information on volunteers, see Chapters 7 & 8 of National Youth Court Guidelines*

### *Disposition Guidelines*

**Consequences must be constructive, not simply punitive. Most effective youth courts incorporate restorative justice principles.**

Constructive consequences will aim to have balance between the three goals of restorative justice.

- Accountability: Increasing understanding of the harm caused, taking responsibility, and making reparations.
- Competency Development: Helping the defendant make better choices in the future with skill building classes or positive development opportunities.
- Community Safety: Ensure that the behavior will not continue by building connections between the youth and the community.

Partnerships with local agencies offering services can provide a broader range of constructive consequences (i.e. counseling, tutoring, defensive driving classes, life skills programs, victim impact panels). Respondents should be given a specific time period for completion of the consequences.

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### *Monitoring Compliance*

The following steps will ensure that respondents complete their requirements and allow for necessary tracking:

- Record the jury's findings on a jury report or disposition form. Keep a copy in the defendant's file.
- Before the respondent leaves the hearing, be sure they know what must be done (when and where) in order to successfully complete tasks assigned by the jury. Keep copies in the case file.
- Check in with the respondent regularly to assess progress toward completing consequences.
- When all consequences are completed:
  - Provide a certificate of completion.
  - Communicate with the referring agent (juvenile court, school administrator) that the defendant is compliant or non-compliant.
  - Make referrals as appropriate to community resource agencies for continued services (i.e. counseling, tutoring, parent services, food boxes, rental assistance).
  - Invite defendant to continue to participate as a volunteer.
  - Collect feedback through post-participation surveys

### *Maintaining Records*

Tracking program data is a way to evaluate the success and document the growth of a program. It is also an important means of producing statistics that can be used for grant applications and promotion of the program within the community.

Create a database for the following defendant information:

- Demographics (age, gender, race, school grade level)
- Offense
- Date of offense and date of hearing

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- Consequences assigned
- Compliance or non-compliance of defendant
- Recidivism
- Completion date

Keep record of respondent paperwork, contact information, completion progress, extension dates, and any communication with the respondent in the case file, and work with your referring agent to determine how long records shall be kept. Consider a policy that requires defendant records to be monitored for recidivism for a set period of time, such as six months.

### *Ethics and Confidentiality*

#### Sample Volunteer Oath

As member of the Youth Court, I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that I must:

- Stay in good standing at school.
- Stay drug and alcohol free.
- Adhere to all state and federal laws.

And I promise to:

- Represent the interests of the \_\_\_\_\_ Teen Court.
- Represent the interests of the defendant.
- Represent the interests of my community.
- Follow the rules regarding confidentiality.
- Be fair to all persons involved.
- Be courteous and respectful at all times.

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### Sample Juror's Oath of Confidentiality

*I SOLEMNLY AFFIRM  
THAT I WILL GIVE CAREFUL ATTENTION  
TO ALL PROCEEDINGS  
WHICH ARE TO TAKE PLACE IN MY PRESENCE,  
AND WILL NOT DIVULGE TO ANYONE  
ANY INFORMATION WHICH COMES TO MY KNOWLEDGE  
AS A RESULT OF THESE TEEN COURT PROCEEDINGS*

*For more information on case management, see Chapter 9 of National Youth Court Guidelines.*

### **Section V: Creative Sanctions**

One of the most effective tools in the youth court process is the crafting of a disposition that not only addresses all three prongs of restorative justice, but personalizes each element specifically to the respondent. This puts an emphasis on asking pointed questions during the hearing to obtain further information about the interests, needs, and concerns of the respondent. Teen volunteers should be trained to look beyond the incident that brought the respondent to youth court and should be provided with additional information discovered during the intake to create a “whole person” picture for the jury. The questioners should be allowed to ask the respondent about school (favorite/challenging classes), career goals, hobbies and interests, and current challenges in their lives. This provides more information for the jury and will pay dividends during the deliberation phase.

Essentially, the three categories of restorative justice are:

- Accountability (taking responsibility for the harm caused and making reparations)
- Community Safety (ensuring that the behavior will not continue by building connections between the youth and the community)
- Competency Development (enhancing skills and building self-confidence)

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Sentencing Option	Percentage of Youth Courts Using Each Option
<b>Community service</b>	<b>99%</b>
<b>Oral/written apologies</b>	<b>94%</b>
<b>Essays</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Educational workshops</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Jury duty</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Restitution</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Alcohol/drug assessment</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Curfews</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Tutoring</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Counseling</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Drug testing</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Victim awareness classes</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Victim/offender mediation</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Peer mediation</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Jail tours</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Observing teen court</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Mentoring</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Suspended driver's license</b>	<b>9%</b>

*Source: NAYC Database, October 2006*

Often a particular disposition element can fit under more than one category of restorative justice. For example, community service can be seen as accountability- making up in a constructive way for the harm cause, community safety- often the service involves “giving back” to the community, and even competency development- if the service ordered employs a respondent’s strengths, talents, or career interests. The very best disposition elements are those that can arguably fit under all three categories.

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Creative disposition are limited only by the amount of information attorneys are able to obtain from the witnesses at the hearing and the imagination of the jury. As a note of caution, the most successful dispositions target only a few key areas that emphasize the three prongs of restorative justice. It is wise to try to limit disposition elements to six or fewer items, and devise consequences that have no charge or very minimal expense. Lastly, it is encouraged that the disposition always require the respondent to return and serve some time as a youth court juror. Often, this outreach by their peers provides the respondents with a sense of acceptance and purpose. Some of the greatest successes arise because a respondent becomes involved and attached to the youth court itself.

### **Section VI: Defining Success**

#### *Publicity*

All youth court programs can benefit from a sound public relations strategy. Developing a public relations plan that addresses the specific needs of each youth court program is highly recommended. This publicity plan requires a demographic-to-market research analysis to identify the needs of the community, court system and schools, and a strategy to pursue public funds or grants. It can be helpful to develop off-the-shelf fact sheets for media and press releases that will promote the program to the local community. Teen members will become the best ambassadors for the youth court program. Keep them in mind as critical participants in special events such as media engagements, presentations to local government bodies, fundraising, school presentations, etc. As part of the public relations strategy it is also important to consider a staff member and volunteer recruiting plan. Consider local television, radio, newspapers and town/city newsletters as potential vehicles for increasing community awareness about the program. Local service clubs often welcome community speakers for their meeting programs. Local businesses may be interested in hosting a fundraising event to raise funds and awareness. Schools also offer an array of public information opportunities for programs that may benefit the students.

#### *Program Evaluation*

One of the most helpful and often overlooked aspects of managing a youth court program is program evaluation. The daily demands of a youth court program can make it difficult to find time and define what to evaluate, yet this assessment process is

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valuable. Without an evaluation plan there is no organizational growth or opportunities for improving program effectiveness. Evaluation measures will also improve the ability of a youth court to compete for limited funds. Youth courts interested in examining the effectiveness of their programs need a framework to systematically monitor and evaluate program activities and results.

One evaluation technique is to apply a performance-based measurement model. A performance-based measurement model calculates recidivism rates, which can be defined in a number of ways, but this method can also be expensive and time consuming. Formulating an evaluation strategy during the program development stage so that data is collected on an ongoing basis can help make this form of evaluation more manageable.

Another evaluation technique uses alternative outcome measures. This method focuses on components of youth courts such as treatment and services, educating youth about the legal system, and the other sentences imposed to promote youth accountability to victims and the community. Measuring outcomes for program components will help assess the effectiveness of individual aspects of the youth court.

*For more information on program evaluation, visit the NAYC website, and see Chapter 10 of National Youth Court Guidelines. Sample program evaluation forms are also available on the CAYC website.*

### *State Associations*

Not every state has a state youth court association, but these associations are becoming more prevalent. There are many advantages to developing a state association. State associations can provide a means for local youth courts to network within their state through regular meetings or annual events, and they can provide a central contact point for information sharing. Local youth courts may also benefit from being able to work closely to solve common problems that occur in their individual states. Another benefit is that state associations can provide a unified voice for local youth courts to help secure needed funding. Two states that have been successful in this way are Florida and New Mexico. Both state associations have worked with their legislatures to allocate state level funding for the local youth courts. To find out if a particular state has an association,

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visit the NAYC website for listings. The NAYC website also provides contact information for other youth courts in each state to encourage networking and development of state associations where they do not yet exist. Active state associations can provide resources such as sample by-laws and other procedures to assist in building new associations.

### *National Association of Youth Courts (NAYC)*

The National Association of Youth Courts, Inc., a 501(c)(3) membership organization, serves as a central point of contact for youth court programs across the nation, providing informational services, delivering training and technical assistance, and developing resource materials on how to develop and enhance youth court programs in the United States.

We are dedicated to providing leadership for a restorative justice model of early intervention so that young people have access to services without formal processing in traditional juvenile justice systems.

Planning for the creation of NAYC began in 2005 with the specific purpose of establishing a private not-for-profit organization to represent and serve local, state and national youth court, teen court, peer court and student court efforts since this local grass-roots movement began a quarter of a century ago.

The official founding of the National Association of Youth Courts, Inc., in 2007, was supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools and Administration for Children, Youth and Families and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Our mission is to constrain the school-to-prison pipelines by providing unique, peer-driven restorative justice models as alternatives to the traditional juvenile justice system. We provide opportunities for youth to feel connected to and supported by their community and help to empower young people to take an active role in addressing criminal offenses of their peers and expand access to justice.

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## Creating A Successful Youth Court Program

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The following sample forms and other program materials are available for downloading from the NAYC website: [www.youthcourt.net](http://www.youthcourt.net)

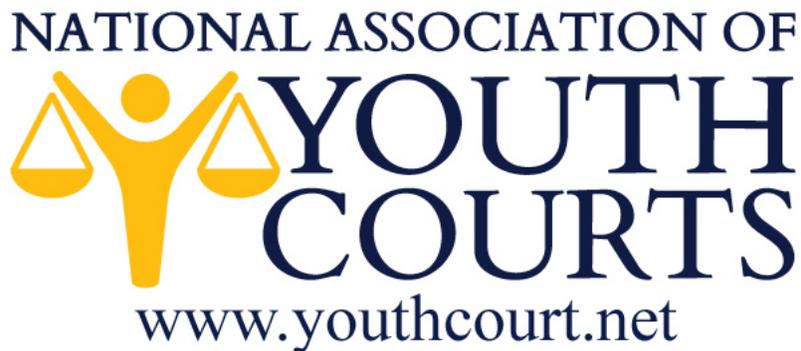
- Program Budget
- Program Coordinator Job Description
- Program Coordinator Duties
- Program Brochure
- Referral Form
- Intake Form
- Hearing Script
- Participation Agreement
- Jury Instructions
- Disposition Sheet
- Disposition Guidelines
- Program Evaluation Forms

*This publication references National Youth Court Guidelines, 2000 edition, with the permission of Tracy Godwin Mullins.*



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION  
*of*  
YOUTH COURTS

[www.calyouthcourts.com](http://www.calyouthcourts.com)



“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”

Frederick Douglass



