

YOUTH IN PHILANTHROPY:

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

PART 2 MANAGING RISK

Attendance of community foundation youth advisory council (YAC) members at regional and national meetings and conferences is a worthwhile endeavour from many perspectives. YAC members gain new ideas, knowledge, skills, connections, and inspiration that benefit themselves personally, their YACS, and their community foundations, as well as a feeling that they are an important part of an exciting, vital movement. Adult community foundation staff and volunteers learn about the interest and commitment of youth in foundations, community and philanthropy, and about youth perspectives, issues and opportunities. The vitality and creativity of youth participation can bring a fresh energy to the program, help generate new ideas and foster an appreciation for the diversity of our communities.

Supporting youth participation at community foundation events is an investment in philanthropy and volunteerism in our organizations and communities. For many youth, it has been a life-changing experience. They have reported that their involvement has determined their educational and career goals, ignited their passion for community engagement, helped them obtain scholarships, learn about issues and ways to address them, gain an appreciation and understanding of the role of civil society organizations, increase their self-confidence, launch new friendships, and seal their commitment to their community foundation and the movement overall.

However, involving minors in community foundation meetings and conferences also represents a significant responsibility. To ensure that it is a positive experience for everyone and achieves the kind of benefits experienced by youth attending previous events, adults must be aware of their “Duty of Care” and undertake reasonable measures to manage risks:

- ✓ **Understand due diligence, risk management, duty of care obligations:** Every organization working with children, youth or other vulnerable persons has a “duty of care” that requires them to take reasonable measures to protect and care for those participating in their programs. This legal and moral obligation applies to both volunteers and paid staff, and should be seen as part of the organization’s approach to due diligence and risk management, and be incorporated into policies, guidelines and practice.

Risk management involves managing risks taken by participants. Although some situations may arise that you cannot prevent, most problems can be avoided with common sense and an awareness of the potential for what could go wrong. “Expect the best, but prepare for the worst.”

- ✓ **Selection of youth:** In determining which youth will represent the community foundation at an event, consider the nature of the event, its location, travel and accommodation requirements, benefits to the youth and to the YAC, and availability or degree of supervision. In some cases, it will be appropriate to send mature, experienced YAC members with particular skills or interests, while at other times, an event may be more suitable for a younger member who is likely to be with the YAC for a long time and is likely to benefit from the exposure to training, new information and other YACs.
- ✓ **Develop code of conduct and expectations:** Discuss relevant legal, ethical and moral issues and responsibilities, and develop a code of conduct. This discussion should be respectful and should include considerable opportunities for exploring issues in an interactive dialogue. Ideally, the guidelines or expectations will be reached by consensus with the youth involved, however all decisions must take into account the community foundation's "Duty of Care" and other relevant legal requirements. Topics to discuss may include, but is not limited to: curfews, attendance at sessions, use of alcohol or drugs, leaving the meeting premises, noise levels in hotel rooms and halls, dress codes (where relevant) and consequences for violating the code of conduct.
- ✓ **Parent orientations and approvals:** Ensure that parents or guardians are informed about the nature of the meeting and all details related to travel, accommodation, costs (if relevant), supervision, code of conduct and expectations. Give them an opportunity to ask questions, and provide detailed print information about arrangements, along with approval forms, waivers and medical information. (See samples.) Also ensure that they are aware of the code of conduct, as well as consequences for violating agreed upon expectations of behaviour.
- ✓ **Responsibility for supervision:** Determine who in your foundation will be responsible for supervision during travel and throughout the meeting or conference. Where participants are under 18, an adult should always be readily available and acting in a supervisory capacity. This involves knowing the whereabouts of all participants, and enforcing curfews and code of conduct. In some cases, it may also mean providing support, direction, or just company, for example, introducing the youth member to others, assisting in participation or presentations, providing guidance in solving problems.
- ✓ **Model behaviour:** An Adult Advisor not only acts in a supervisory capacity, but also as a role model for the members of the YAC. Inappropriate behaviours are readily noted by youth and can send mixed messages that may cause confusion, problems or affect working relationships. Ensure that your behaviour will not raise questions or be a source of mistrust or disrespect.

- ✓ **Avoid potentially harmful situations:** Although some potentially harmful situations may be difficult to predict and impossible to prevent, others can be avoided through careful planning and common sense. For example, monitor weather reports and avoid travelling in perilous conditions; never provide or condone the use of alcohol with minors; know where YAC members are at all times; make yourself readily available in case of problems.

- ✓ **Insurance coverage:** Other risk management measures will include ensuring appropriate insurance coverage. Directors' and Officers' Liability Insurance is important in minimizing director's personal liability for claims arising from volunteer or staff activities undertaken in the name of the organization. In addition, individuals whose responsibilities include driving youth volunteers to events or meetings will need to ensure appropriate auto insurance coverage. Detailed information regarding types and amounts of coverage should be obtained from a local insurance broker, as requirements will vary according to jurisdictions and specific situations.

Managing and supporting a community foundation youth advisory council must include monitoring and managing risk and liability. Appropriate policies, guidelines and training are integral to risk management and should be routinely applied and regularly reviewed. All parties involved – board members, staff, adult advisors and other volunteers, youth participants and their parents – should be aware of the organization's commitment to exercising its "Duty of Care" and the steps it takes to do so. Attention and adherence to the measures on this checklist are an important part of that commitment.