

Northfield Youth on Boards is a Healthy Community Initiative program that offers a unique opportunity for youth to get involved in local government, make change, and have a voice.

Opportunities include the Mayor's Youth Council, the District Youth Council, the City of Northfield Boards and Commissions, and Nonprofit Boards.

What are the goals of the Youth on Boards program?

Primary outcome:

- Expose young people to the civic process through participation on a City Board or Commission

Secondary outcomes for youth:

- Gain an understanding of City issues
- Provide insights on issues
- See adult Board members as resources
- Have the opportunity to serve on a committee or task force

Outcomes for adults:

- See youth as community experts
- Gain broader perspectives on City issues



What is the role of the adult advisor?

The adult advisor is an HCI employee who serves as a liaison between the youth and the adult board and commission members. The adult advisor is available to:

- Help youth members understand board-related terms and processes
- Support youth and adults with communication and building strong partnerships
- Ensure youth are able to share important information from commission meetings with their peers and connect with others in the community who are engaged in related efforts
- Partner with the City, organizations and community members to ensure youth voice remains embedded in local decision-making processes

The adult advisor, Emily Culver, can be reached at emily@healthycommunityinitiative.org

Important reminders

- A lack of vocal participation is not necessarily a sign of a lack of interest. Youth take back what they hear. Information transparency is an important sign of power-sharing for young people.
- Youth commit to attending monthly commission meetings. While they are encouraged to join a committee, schedules may not allow for an additional commitment.
- If a youth member misses a meeting and does not email or text the staff liaison ahead of time, please let the adult advisor know right away. If a youth member misses two meetings in a row (regardless of contact), please let the adult advisor know. Email Emily Culver at emily@healthycommunityinitiative.org

Key takeaways on working with teens*

- **Teens are still learning.** Adults often misinterpret teen behavior as rude or careless, when really they're still developing life skills. They may not know how to advocate for themselves yet, so they need guidance without judgment.
- Remembering what their own teen experience was like, adults can better approach youth when they employ plenty of empathy and patience. Expecting teens to act a certain way can lead to self-fulfilling outcomes. **The key is listening with an open mind and respecting where teens are in their development.**
- Teens are often expected to be both mature and immature, which is confusing! Rather than expecting certain types of behavior, **be ready to provide support when needed and take advantage of teachable moments** so teens don't have to struggle alone.
- Teens thrive when they feel they have autonomy—making choices, managing responsibilities and seeing purpose in their actions. **Feeling respected encourages openness, whereas treating teens like children can shut them down.**
- **Create opportunities for exploration so teens can figure out their goals and grow without pressure.** Life doesn't need to be figured out all at once—reassure teens that they have time.
- Teenagers can sometimes lash out to protect themselves from judgment. Someone (usually the adult) has to break the ice. **Fortunately, teens value authenticity in adults. Those who can be a little vulnerable (maybe not with the big things, but at least the small personal connections) are likely to earn more respect and build trust and openness.**

