

teen advisory guidebook



The teen advisory guidebook and training series

is a collaborative project of the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality and the Neutral Zone teen center. It emerged from an exciting two-year venture called the Youth Driven Space initiative (www.youthdrivenspace.org). A goal of this initiative was to learn about the key ingredients for creating dynamic youth-driven programs for teens. We learned that one of the best ways to make a space youth-driven is to support a teen advisory council!

Training workshops to accompany this guide are available in a variety of formats; for more information please visit www.cypq.org.



The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality,

a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is dedicated to improving youth experiences in the places where they spend time, particularly in afterschool and other out-of-school time environments. The Weikart Center encourages managers to prioritize program quality. We offer training, technical assistance, and research services that all come together in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs. To learn more, please visit www.cypq.org.



The Neutral Zone was founded in 1998

to provide high-quality youth-driven activities and programs where high school aged teens can lead, create, and innovate. The Neutral Zone targets a diverse teen audience from across the Ann Arbor area and provides them supports and opportunities to engage in social change, creative expression, community leadership and cultural and educational enrichment. The mission, written by youth, continues to be the voice and heart that drive the Center's creative and leadership activities: The Neutral Zone is a diverse, youth-driven teen center dedicated to promoting personal growth through artistic expression, community leadership and the exchange of ideas.

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DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

teen advisory guidebook

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DAVID P. WEIKART

CENTER FOR YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

Dear reader,

As members of the Neutral Zone Teen Advisory Council, we're very happy to be writing the preface to this guide!

The Neutral Zone's Teen Advisory Council has been one of the most valuable opportunities so far in our lives. By being involved in a council that is dedicated to building teen voice, we have been able to impact the Neutral Zone and gain valuable lessons to improve our leadership. We are more than just individuals, but a community that is built on relationships from working together. In addition, we have learned to voice our opinions and advocate for others. We have also improved our communication skills both with adults and amongst our peers. And, as a result we have become leaders to others at the Neutral Zone and beyond.

We hope that this guide can help you build a strong Teen Advisory Council, founded on community, meaningful work, and fun.

Best of Luck,

Amanda Heckenkamp and Slade Carter
Neutral Zone Teen Advisory Council



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why have a TAC?

Youth are competent.

Youth are resources.

***TAC will provide valuable experiences for youth
& will strengthen your organization***

Establishing a TAC has two main purposes.

First, it gives young people tremendous, meaningful leadership experiences and the opportunity to learn about how an organization operates. Second, it can improve your program by making it more youth-driven, which may lead to improved attendance. The table at the bottom of the page lists several ways the TAC may benefit both the program and the youth participants.

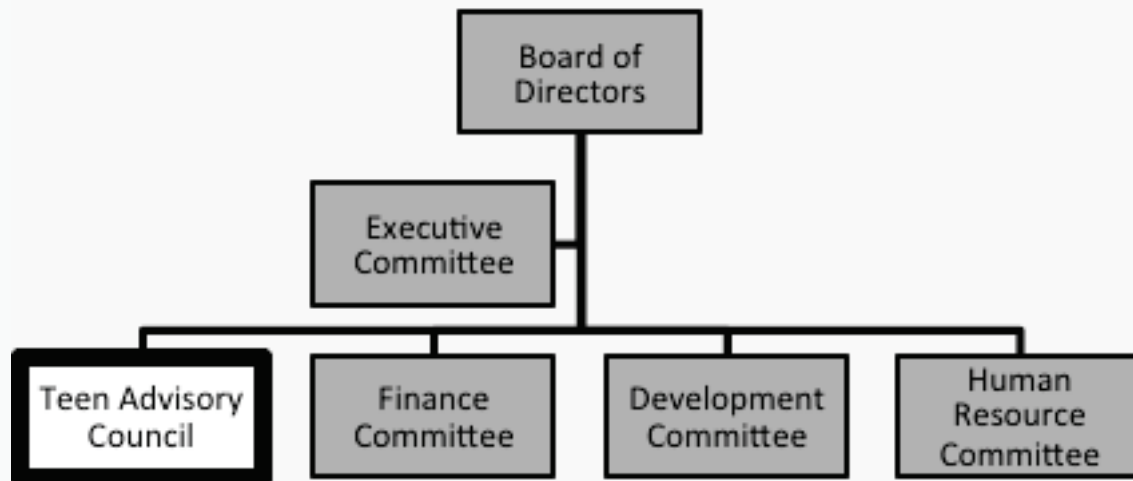
A structure like TAC gives teens valuable “21st Century skills” by providing opportunities for teens to lead and drive programs, and experience roles that they would otherwise not have access to in an organization. 21st Century skills are those defined by business and community stakeholders in reaction to the real world concerns employers have about workforce entrants (Partnership for 21st Century skills [P21], 2008). By playing a genuine leadership role in TAC through approving, funding and evaluating programs, teens learn accountability and develop the motivation required to create, manage and guide projects. Additionally, teens develop specific skills including planning and reflection, communication, critical thinking, adaptability, initiative, collaboration and innovation.

For the program

- The TAC can create a powerful group of youth who advocate for meaningful youth voice.
- The TAC can create an ongoing structure to support meaningful youth participation.
- The TAC can ensure that youth ideas are a central part of the decision-making for creating and improving programs.

For youth

- Through the TAC, youth can see how organizational decisions are made.
- Through the TAC, youth can take on meaningful leadership roles.
- Through the TAC, youth develop 21st Century skills; things like initiative, strategic thinking, innovation, and decision-making.
- Through the TAC, youth can become invested in their community to create positive change.



About this guide: Neutral Zone

The creation of this guide was a joint venture between the Weikart Center and Neutral Zone, a youth-driven teen center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The strategies and activities on these pages have all been well polished throughout the decade of Neutral Zone's existence.

Here's a little background:

Neutral Zone is a diverse, youth-driven teen center dedicated to promoting personal growth through artistic expression, community leadership and the exchange of ideas. Neutral Zone hosts afterschool drop-in, weekend concerts and special events, and 26 programs in the areas of music, visual arts, literary arts, community leadership, and education.

The Teen Advisory Council at Neutral Zone began in 1998 when the organization was first founded by youth and adult community members. The founders set up the TAC to ensure that strong youth leadership would guide the organization as it grew. The TAC initially determined its purpose broadly as an all-youth decision-making body dedicated to approving new programs and addressing important decisions about the organization.

Developing the Neutral Zone TAC has been a process. Throughout the past ten years, the TAC has and continues to reflect on its practices and develop new ones to be more effective in its work. Some of the TAC's greatest challenges have led to new, innovative practices. Over time, the activities of the Neutral Zone TAC have become critical components for ensuring that youth are driving the success of the organization.

In 2003, the TAC recognized that Neutral Zone programs consistently needed money to help achieve their goals and added fundraising to its focus. In 2004, the TAC hosted a Gala event generating approximately \$3,000. They then created a system for distributing funds to support other programs at the Neutral Zone. Since that time the TAC continues to raise and grant funds on an annual basis. In 2007, TAC members participated in the annual Neutral Zone program evaluation. Following a successful program evaluation in 2008, TAC became a standing committee of the Board of Directors, replacing the Program Committee, which was mostly made up of adults (see diagram below). As a result, the TAC now defines its purpose: to drive Neutral Zone's program success through program approval, fundraising, grant-making and evaluation.



teen advisory council:

core components



Sample TAC Meeting Structure

Positions: Two youth facilitators
Secretary
Treasurer
(elections hosted in May each year)

Meetings: Tuesdays, 7-8:30pm

Facilitation: Two youth facilitators meet to reflect on past meeting, create weekly agenda based on the group strategic plan, and determine facilitation roles.

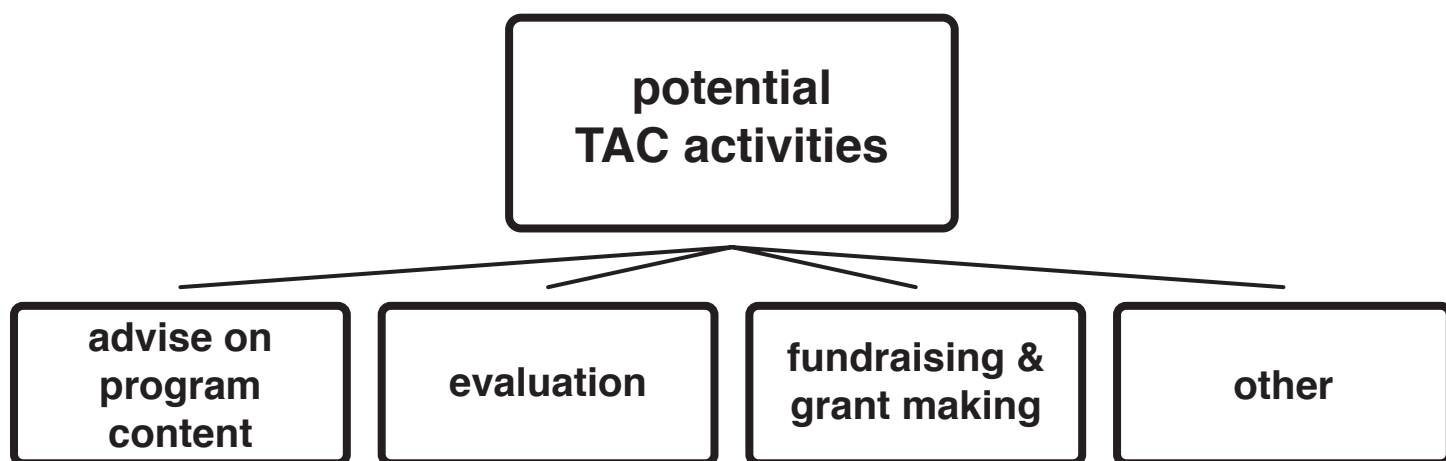
Key activities:

- 1) Gala Fundraiser each year
- 2) Grant making to support approximately 8-12 youth projects and initiatives.
- 3) Advocacy to teens.
- 4) Approves approximately 2-3 new programs each year.
- 5) Evaluates programs and reports recommendations to the Board of Directors each May.



overview: potential tac activities

Once the group feels a sense of community, has a clear purpose, and has functioning structures in place, the stage is set to make an impact. The section summarizes activities in which a TAC may participate. Note that these are only examples; your TAC activities should be driven by the purpose and goals you establish. This page provides a summary; detailed information on potential TAC activities is presented on the next several pages.



Planning a service learning or social action project

Besides using their leadership skills within the organization, TAC members may wish to use their resources and energy for impact in the greater community. When youth have opportunities to provide service or work to create social change, they can develop new networks, become more aware of other community groups, and increase their overall community investment.

If the TAC has decided to do a service or social action project, the first step might be deciding what kind of project to do. This conversation could occur during strategic planning (see page XX) or at another time. The TAC may consider projects that members feel passionately about and that they have resources to support. And, TAC might consider issues facing their community and even talk to key leaders to determine what they might focus their energy on supporting. Some examples of projects are:

- Working with a local children’s hospital to create activity books for patients.
- Run a community-building day for other youth programs- especially those who work with elementary or middle school youth.
- Work on a community garden project to provide fresh food to low-income communities.
- Host a climate survey project to advocate policy to prevent bullying and harassment.
- Host art and music workshops for youth from low-income communities.

Many groups take part in community service, but the factor that can turn this into learning is reflection. That is, the adult facilitator can provide intentional opportunities for youth to consider what they are experiencing throughout the service learning or social action project.

As TAC prepares for a service learning project or social action project, the adult facilitator may work with group to host a diversity workshop, especially if the project involves interacting with other community identities such as age or a different identity group than the participation of the council. There are a variety of strategies such as simulation activities, movies, or reading in which the group may participate in advance to encourage conversation and dialogue that may be vital to the success of working with other groups in the community. It is also critical to provide adequate time after the project to reflect on the youths’ experience. The next page contains a sample worksheet for guiding this reflection.

21ST CENTURY SKILL:

Civic Literacy

Through implementing a service-learning project, TAC learns from the world around them and realizes their responsibilities as a local and global citizen.

TIPS: Planning a Community Service Event

- Brainstorm what the members of TAC want to contribute and learn from the community
- Research organizations or the contacts of people who are working in that area of the community
- Work with the community to find out their needs and how TAC can assist on a project and plan an event
- If relevant, plan a training beforehand to set expectations and think about possible difficulties that arise from volunteering.
- After the event, reflect on what you learned from the project and the impact you may have had on the community.

conclusion

We hope that you find benefits from the strategies and activity guides presented in this guide. A Teen Advisory Council can be such a vibrant and powerful component of a youth program, that we want to see successful TACs across the country!

As you saw on these pages, establishing and maintaining a TAC requires two things from adults: the sharing of power with youth in order to open up opportunities for youth to lead, and guidance to help youth be successful with their new power. While this guide provides lots of great strategies for establishing your TAC, it only touches on the adult-youth interaction strategies that you'll need to employ in order to be successful.

The great news is, the rest of the guides in the Weikart Center training series go into great depth. Each guide provides realistic, proven strategies for working with youth. We recommend utilizing multiple methods as you put together your TAC and throughout all aspects of your program.

Specifically, the Voice and Choice Method addresses the ideas behind TAC in a broad framework. The core TAC component of building community is described more fully in the Building Community Method. The interaction strategies in the Ask-Listen-Encourage Method can significantly help an adult who is working with a TAC. For more information, see the inside back cover of this guide.

In addition, the idea of TAC and youth-driven programming is growing. An Internet search today provides far more hits than a similar search just a few years ago. Perhaps as time goes on, the idea of involving teens in the running of a program will become commonplace. Until then, we wish you the best of luck in your TAC!