



EXTENSION IMPACT

Youth in Governance

Youth leadership development is critical in building civic capacity, social capital, and long-term community sustainability in local communities. Programs that teach useful skills and build the self-confidence of young people ensure capable, effective leaders for the next generation. In addition, recent national trends including an increase in youth civic service and a new emphasis on civic education in schools indicate a growing need for leadership training to ensure young people are prepared to participate in political and civic life.

In response to the lack of leadership opportunities for youth in local communities, several counties in Wisconsin developed and implemented the Youth in Governance program. The purpose of Extension's Youth in Governance programs is to create a model of youth empowerment through direct participation in local government. Youth participating in Youth in Governance sit on county boards or on county board committees and receive mentoring from elected officials. The overall goal is to bring youth voice to community issues and concerns while fostering the development of confident, independent, and motivated youth leaders. Extension uses its expertise in facilitating strong working relationships with adults and youth to lead training, orientation, and ongoing development for local government partners and youth participants.

In 2020, Extension worked with 121 youth participants in 12 locally based Youth in Governance Programs that were located in 11 Wisconsin counties. While each locally implemented Youth In Governance program operates differently, most include all or some of the following components: An elected official serves as mentor to youth participant; youth sit on broader council/board as well as a committee/subcommittee; a youth cohort meets regularly as a learning community; each youth member has a capstone project; and youth present/publicly speak. In some cases, youth craft or assist with crafting policy.

In a 2020 retrospective pre-post survey of Youth in Governance programming (n=32), youth participants attributed their participation in the program with improvements in a variety of areas, for example: 80% of participants improved confidence speaking in front of groups; 80% increased their ability to work with others to make change; 85% improved knowledge and understanding of community issues.

Extension empowers young people in decision making directly in their community, preparing the next generation of civic leaders, and building systems in which youth voice is valued and prioritized.

Past participants in the Youth in Governance program report that they are more likely to be involved in a government-related career in the future or pursue a public office. For example, Abby Korb served as a Racine County Youth in Governance (YIG) representative in 2015-2016: "At the time, I had no clue how impactful YIG would be on my future career. I always said that I did not want to go into government or any form of public service, but rather took part in YIG as a learning experience. However, when I got to college, my whole outlook changed. I ended up earning my BA in politics and government and held various other political and governmental internships and jobs, including an internship in the U.S. Senate."

The Youth in Governance program is part of Extension's Positive Youth Development Institute. Learn more by visiting extension.wisc.edu/youth.

in 2020



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served through the Youth in Governance program



120+
youth participants



85%
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