

Youth Participation in Local Government:  
Youth Outcomes of the Kenosha County Youth In Governance Program

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**Abstract**

The Kenosha County Youth In Governance program was created to build leadership skills and civic engagement opportunities for high school-aged students by placing two youth representatives on each of the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors standing committees. In reviewing data from 38 youth participants, the program was effective in increasing civic engagement and leadership skills of young people. Respondents reported specific increases in knowledge of county government, connection to community, empowerment, communication skills and confidence. Effective program practices were also identified from reviewing statements made from youth participants.

### **Situation**

In order to maintain a healthy democracy, young people need to be educated and encouraged to become part of an active civic culture, but they are often excluded from authentic community decision-making opportunities (Zeldin et al, 2003.) Local government in Wisconsin has partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Extension Cooperative Extension in several cities and counties to create opportunities for youth representation and learning via appointment to boards, committees, and commissions. These efforts vary in form, with youth serving on full county boards, on committees, or both, with an advisory vote in Adams, Dane, Douglas, Kenosha, Marquette, Oneida, Racine, and Washburn County Boards. Youth are also represented on city councils in Superior and Waupaca (where youth are voting members of committees.) These efforts have several purposes, among them promoting civic education, developing leadership and other life skills in youth participants, and potentially improving decision-making as a result of hearing youth input.

This study focuses on one such program's effects on youth participants. The Kenosha County Youth In Governance program involves high school youth who are at an opportune stage for increasing their engagement in civic life. Civic involvement in adolescence through community service and organizational involvement is linked to adult community involvement and political participation. Participation in organizations develops social networks that connect members to community and political activities (Flanagan, 2004). Adolescents and young adults are also engaged in identity formation, including developing ideological and moral positions (Erickson, 1968) and are entering into a relationship with society that includes positive civic action (Youniss, McLellan and Yates, 1997).

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The National League of Cities (2010) recognizes authentic youth civic engagement in local government via several pathways, such as involvement in projects and meetings, ongoing consultation with youth councils, and representation on boards and commissions. Structures of youth involvement in local government vary widely. Hundreds of U.S. cities have youth councils run through mayor's offices or in partnership with schools or intermediaries. Other cities have designated seats on city boards and commissions for youth members. For example, youth serve one-year terms with voting rights on ten boards and commissions in Boise, Idaho. The National League of Cities has documented benefits to municipalities, e.g. increased support for city initiatives, improved policies and programs for youth, and identification as a youth-friendly community. Youth participants benefit by developing productive attitudes about their role in the community and becoming valuable adult members of the workforce and civic leadership.

### **Local Needs Assessment**

Data from a 2006 Kenosha County *Search Institute* youth asset survey documented that only 23% of youth perceived that their community valued youth and only 27% believed that youth were given useful roles in the community. These results were among the lowest of all the assets measured and were lower than similar assets measured at a national level.

Kenosha County elected officials, business leaders, school administrators and community leaders studied these results and conducted a scan of youth participation options in Kenosha County. The scan revealed that, outside the school environment, youth participation opportunities were limited. The few examples of formal public decision-making roles included one youth seat on Kenosha Unified Schools District's school board that rotated every month, a Kenosha Mayor's Youth Commission that reviews scholarship applications and the Kenosha

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County Youth As Resources Board which is a youth group that grants funds to other youth groups in Kenosha County.

### **Program Implementation and Objectives**

In response to the Search Institute findings and the scan, Kenosha County Board Supervisor, Mark Molinaro approached Kenosha County UW-Extension to explore options for providing opportunities for youth to participate in Kenosha County government. Kenosha County UW-Extension was asked because the organization demonstrated success in creating and sustaining positive youth development programs that focused on engaging youth in leadership roles. Specific examples included the Kenosha County 4-H program and the Kenosha County Youth As Resources program.

UW-Extension convened a group of youth and adults to explore models of youth engagement in government. This group consulted with staff, elected officials and youth participants from other local government youth participation programs affiliated with UW-Extension. As a result of the committee's recommendations it was determined that a successful model would be inviting youth to serve on county board committees and actively participate in the legislative process.

The Kenosha County Youth In Governance program was initiated by the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors in 2007. The Youth In Governance (YIG) program was intended to create a model of youth empowerment while providing an opportunity for youth to develop leadership skills through direct participation in local government. The objectives of the Kenosha County YIG program are:

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### Short Term Objectives

- Create environments that are conducive to the positive development of youth voice and youth engagement.
- Provide youth with skills, knowledge and experiences that prepare them to be effective partners for positive change in Kenosha County.

### Medium Term Objective

- Through experiential learning, youth will have the opportunity to effectively understand and apply several leadership skills.

### Long Term Objective

- Youth will become active community partners and leaders.

The Kenosha County Board of Supervisors Resolution allowed for two youth to serve on every standing committee of the County Board of Supervisors. These youth would serve alongside county board supervisors as an “active” member of the committee. The youth would vote on all matters that came before the committee, but their vote could not “count” officially as they were not elected county board supervisors. However, their vote would be recorded in the official minutes of the meetings.

The process to select youth to serve in YIG begins in January each year. All high schools throughout Kenosha County are asked to nominate youth for the program. There are several press releases sent to all media outlets throughout the county encouraging anyone to nominate youth. During the three years (2010-13) covered by this evaluation, 488 youth were nominated from 11 high schools and 114 youth completed the application (Appendix A) for Youth In Governance.

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All youth who are nominated are sent a personalized “Congratulations Letter” encouraging them to complete an application for Youth In Governance. The requirements to serve in YIG are:

- be a high school student in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- have a GPA of 2.5 or greater
- be a Kenosha County resident
- be able to attend the monthly meetings of their committee
- attend at least one Kenosha County Board meeting during their term
- participate in the YIG Bus Tour held last Wednesday in June
- be able to attend additional committee meetings that are combined with other committees

All applications received are reviewed and screened by UW-Extension educators to select candidates to be interviewed. There is an effort to include youth from all high schools throughout the county in the interview process. In addition to the basic requirements, the screening criteria include the ability to express oneself clearly, evidence of leadership abilities and skills, participation in a variety of activities, willingness to learn new things and the quality of the adult reference input. Youth selected from the screening process are invited to an interview.

The Planning, Development & Extension Education Committee (PDEEC) of the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors conducts the face-to-face interviews. PDEEC includes two Youth In Governance members. The Committee interviews approximately 24 youth for 14 positions on seven board committees (Executive, Finance/Administration, Human Services Committee, Judiciary & Law Committee, Planning, Development & Extension Education, Public

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Works/Facilities, Joint Services Committees.) After the interviews, the rating sheets (Appendix B) are summarized and youth are selected for the 14 positions. Youth are asked to rank their preference for which committee they would like to serve on. There is an effort to place youth on their first or second choice committee.

In May each year, selected Youth In Governance members participate in an orientation to prepare them for their committee assignment. The orientation is held prior to the County Board meeting where they are appointed to their respective committee. A Youth In Governance Handbook provides a basic reference for the program. The face-to-face orientation conducted by Kenosha County UW-Extension educators includes:

- Review of County government
- What is a typical committee meeting like?
- The role of YIG members
- Review of YIG policies
- The role of mentors

Based on input from past YIG members, Youth In Governance members are now required to participate in an all-day tour of county government. This includes meeting with the county department and division heads and getting a “behind-the-scenes” tour in the various facilities to learn the functions of each office. Newly elected county board supervisors are invited to participate in the tour as well and frequently do so!

Kenosha County Board Supervisors or key Kenosha County staff are selected by the Planning, Development & Extension Education Committee Chairperson to serve as mentors to YIG members on each committee. Mentors are the liaison between the youth committee



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members and the county board supervisors and staff. More specifically, the mentors ensure that the youth receive the full benefits from participation. They become the “go-to person” for youth when they have any questions about the committee process or county government.

**Youth In Governance Members.** Youth who are selected to participate in Youth In Governance come from a variety of backgrounds (Table 1) including school and community experiences. Many youth are actively involved in sports or music or other school and community organizations. They are often in leadership roles on their athletic team, school clubs, community organizations (*i.e. 4-H, Scouting, church*), or are a class officer. Although the minimum requirement for program participation is a 2.5 grade point average, the average GPA for Youth In Governance members is 3.78 on a 4 point scale.

**Table 1: Demographics of Youth In Governance Participants**

	White	African American	Alaskan/ Am. Ind.	Asian	Pac. Islander	Hispanic	Non Hispanic	Male	Female	Average GPA
2010-2011	16	0	0	2	0	0	18	7	11	3.79
2011-2012	11	1	0	2	0	0	14	5	9	3.82
2012-2013	12	1	0	1	0	0	14	7	7	3.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3.78</b>

One of the unanticipated challenges in the program has been youth attendance at committee meetings. Youth In Governance members have many activities competing for their time and they often find themselves unable to attend a committee meeting. Over time, YIG members felt that a youth who did not attend a committee meeting was taking away an opportunity for a youth who could participate. The YIG members recommended an attendance policy. The current policy is that any YIG member not attending at least 50% of their committee

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meetings by November will be asked to step down and an alternate will take their place on the committee. This policy has had to be enforced one time in the seven years of the program.

Youth are expected to participate in the monthly committee meetings. County Board committee meetings are held in the evenings (Monday – Thursday) and are approximately one to two hours long. Most committees provide background materials and reports that support/explain the issues on the meeting agenda. YIG members are expected to review the meeting materials prior to the meeting. If they have any questions about any materials or an item on the agenda, they are encouraged to check in with their mentor and ask questions.

There are typically five County Board supervisors serving on a committee. With two Youth In Governance members, that brings the total committee membership to seven. Youth often ask questions to clarify the decision before them and may be encouraged by the chair to share their views. Youth may vote on any issue on the agenda. However, because youth are not elected to the County Board, their vote cannot ‘count’ officially. In most committees, the chairperson will ask for the youth to vote first in order to avoid being influenced by the adults. Their vote is recorded for the meeting minutes.

### **Evaluation Methodology**

#### **Data Collection**

Surveys (Appendix C) were collected from 79% of program participants (38 of 48 participants) after a year of participation. Survey questions included retrospective post-then-pre items with a Likert scale to measure changes in civic engagement and leadership skill development. A retrospective design was selected because of the likelihood of response shift

(Howard, 1980) as respondents' understanding of and attitude toward the indicators was likely to be affected by the program experience.

Open-ended questions invited participants to write about the two primary program objectives (building an opportunity for youth voice and engagement and developing leadership skills) and a third question asking what they have gained in general from the program.

### **Analysis**

Numerical data were analyzed by calculating means and by counting the number and percentage of participants who reported change over the year of the program. Means were also calculated comparing participants self-reports of their present and prior abilities and attitudes.

The qualitative data were analyzed using an iterative process beginning with a content analysis of narrative data followed by a comparison of results to theoretically derived program objectives based on civic education (e.g. Levine, 2007) and life skills (Hendricks, 1996) models that frequently ground non-formal education in Extension and similar contexts. Two educators involved in the program and an external colleague open-coded the narrative data collected in the open-ended questions. The coders compared categories and agreed upon a set of key themes. These themes were then compared to the civic engagement and leadership skill constructs included in the survey.

This iterative process led to a grouping of data into several areas:

#### **A. Civic Engagement and Local Connection**

1. Knowledge of local government process
2. Empowerment and self-efficacy for civic action

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3. Feeling a strong connection to Kenosha County
4. Respect for local public officials
5. Awareness of local issues

### B. Leadership Skills and Confidence

1. Speaking and participating in group discussions
2. Seeing issues from multiple perspectives
3. Talking knowledgeably about local issues

### C. Effective Program Practices

A content analysis of data in each category led to key findings which provide rich context to the quantitative results.

## **Results**

### **Civic Engagement Outcomes**

The Kenosha County Youth In Governance program was designed to provide program participants the opportunity to become engaged in “the process” through their work on Kenosha County Board Committees. Although each committee had different responsibilities, expectations and formats, the overall function of each committee was fairly consistent providing a common framework to establish the program. As part of the evaluation process, several items focused specifically on three elements of civic engagement: knowledge, connection and empowerment.

Program evaluation results indicated that youth participants increased their knowledge of Kenosha County government, feel a stronger connection to Kenosha County and have a more useful role in the community. Youth responded to statements using a 5-point Likert scale from

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“Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Additional information was also collected from youth participants written responses to three questions.

Prior to participating in the Kenosha County Youth In Governance program participants as a whole reported that they would “disagree” with the statement “I am knowledgeable about Kenosha County government” as compared to after participating in the program where these same participants self-reported that they would “agree” with the same statement. This increase in knowledge about Kenosha County Government was reported by 92% (Table 2) of participants who completed the evaluation. The average score in this category increased from 2.21 to 4.34 which was a net change of +2.13 (Table 3) and the largest net change recorded. Written responses support these findings, but also provide additional insight into what specific knowledge was gained by program participants. After reviewing these written responses, two themes emerged (1) knowledge of how government functions and (2) knowledge of how decisions are made.

**Table 2: % of Participants Reporting Change**

<b>N = 38 of 48 Civic Engagement</b>	<b>%Reporting No Change</b>	<b>%Reporting Positive Change</b>
I am knowledgeable about Kenosha County Government	8%	92%
I am aware of local issues that affect Kenosha County	18%	82%
My opinion can make a difference in the community	34%	66%
I am interested in politics	42%	58%
I have a useful role in the community	32%	68%
I feel a strong connection to Kenosha County	26%	74%
<b>Leadership Skills</b>	<b>%Reporting No Change</b>	<b>%Reporting Positive Change</b>
I can participate in group discussions with adults	34%	66%
I can speak confidently before a group of adults *	34%	63%
I can see issues from multiple perspectives	47%	53%
I can share new ideas with others	53%	47%
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues*	16%	81%
I can be a resource to people in Kenosha County*	26%	68%

\*Items do not add to 100 because some respondents marked “unsure.”

**Table 3: Average Response to Each Indicator**

N = 38 of 48	Average “Before” Program	Average “After” Program	Net Change
<b>Civic Engagement</b>			
<i>Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree</i>			
I am knowledgeable about Kenosha County Government	2.21	4.34	+2.13
I am aware of local issues that affect Kenosha County	3.15	4.52	+1.37
My opinion can make a difference in the community	3.18	4.21	+1.03
I am interested in politics	3.65	4.36	+0.71
I have a useful role in the community	3.68	4.44	+0.76
I feel a strong connection to Kenosha County	3.21	4.58	+1.37
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
<i>Scale: (1) Unsure* (2) No Ability (3) Some Ability (4) Good Ability (5) Excellent Ability</i>			
I can participate in group discussions with adults	3.61	4.47	+0.86
I can speak confidently before a group of adults	3.51	4.32	+0.81
I can see issues from multiple perspectives	3.89	4.70	+0.81
I can share new ideas with others	3.71	4.21	+0.50
I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues	2.86	4.34	+1.48
I can be a resource to people in Kenosha County	2.83	4.13	+1.30

\*Responses marked “unsure” were dropped from the results.

Kenosha County Youth In Governance program participants as a whole reported an increased connection to Kenosha County. This increased connection was reported by 74% (Table 2) of participants who completed the evaluation. The average score in this category increased from 3.21 to 4.58 which was a net change of +1.37. (Table 3) These results were supported through statements made by participants and focused on two themes (1) connections to Kenosha County and (2) connections to Kenosha County Board Supervisors. One youth participant wrote: “The Youth In Governance program allowed me to become more positively engaged with the community and succeeded in making me more civically aware. I now feel more connected and involved with the issues of Kenosha County and my community.” Although not every participant highlighted these connections in written statements, there were several statements that focused on these themes.

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When responding to the statement “I have a useful role in the community,” 68% of program participants reported an increase of at least one unit (Table 2), however the overall average score only increased +0.76 (Table 3). This net change was one of the lowest recorded in the evaluation. Written statements from youth participants support these findings, but also help identify limitations of the program as well. Several youth expressed having a seat at the table was a positive step, but did not feel they had enough background information or experience to express an opinion when there were opportunities to make contributions. “YIG provides the perfect environment to allow the youth of Kenosha to have a voice. However, in my personal experiences, I do not have enough knowledge about regulations, programs, grants, equipment, licenses, etc. to actively participate in the majority of the conversations.” Although most youth reported learning a great deal about local government, some also acknowledged that they would require deeper command of the issues to fully develop a viewpoint.

### **Skills and Confidence Outcomes**

Throughout the Youth In Governance experience, youth have opportunities to gain new leadership skills and strengthen others. Depending upon the issues that come before the committee, the youth are able to provide their input and raise issues with regard to the topics discussed.

Program evaluation results indicate that youth have strengthened their confidence and leadership abilities after participating in the Youth In Governance program. Youth ranked themselves on the following scale:

(1) Unsure, (2) No Ability, (3) Some Ability, (4) Good Ability, (5) Excellent Ability

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Because of the possibility that “Unsure” could be interpreted as a response that does not scale with the others, this response was not included in the mean calculations. As it was selected by very few respondents, the results are not substantively different.

Youth indicated that they have improved their ability to communicate about local issues as a result of Youth In Governance. The largest change, with the average score increasing from 2.86 to 4.34, was in their ability to talk knowledgeably with others about local issues.

They also gained leadership skills such as participating in group discussions, speaking confidently before a group of adults, and seeing issues from multiple perspectives. They believe that the YIG experience helped develop their capacity to feel more confident in their leadership abilities and provided a real world experience to interact with adults. Youth In Governance members shared the following reflections from their experience: One wrote: “As a result of my participation in the YIG program I have acquired a greater mastery of the skills associated with civil involvement and awareness. I have a greater knowledge about local issues and how local government works;” another observed: “The most important thing I have gained from my participation in the Kenosha County YIG program is the skill of seeing issues from multiple perspectives. I am now able to respectfully voice my opinion while still listening to and taking others into consideration.”

County Board Supervisors have shared that youth members have influenced their opinion through their perspectives shared in meetings. During a committee discussion to consider reducing the number of signatures required for county board supervisor nomination papers, one youth member voiced her opinion that the existing minimum 100 signatures required was not an exceptionally large number given that each supervisor represents approximately 7,200 persons.



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After further discussion, supervisors agreed with her and they did not make any changes to the nomination process.

Through Youth In Governance, youth are given a place and a voice at the table. These experiences have benefitted youth to increase their self-confidence and strengthen inter-personal communication skills that contribute to their overall leadership capacity.

### **Effective Program Practices**

Participants used the open-ended evaluation questions to address program practices and structures that affected their learning and experience. Key areas included whether they felt welcomed and respected by adult members, the degree to which they were able to act as participants rather than spectators, and having equal access to information and other resources. Since youth participants were serving on specific committees, the dynamics of that group, the role of the chair, and their own personalities affected their experiences.

**Welcome from Adult Board Members.** The small, personal committee environment meant that the quality of personal interactions were significant to youth participants' experiences. Many respondents observed that the adult board members worked hard to create an environment that promoted their engagement. They reported that they were specifically invited to speak and encouraged to take an active role in discussions. Some respondents said the adults took an interest in their school and other activities, which helped them build relationships. A small number did not experience this support, feeling that some adults were not interested in their opinions, which was a barrier to their full participation.

Mentors are assigned to youth participants, but respondents did not specifically address the role of their mentors in open-ended comments. Zeldin and Collura (2009) studied the role of

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mentors in the program and found that youth members received support from multiple sources, including the mentor in some cases, and found this support essential to a positive experience.

**Information Support.** Youth participants received the same packets of information as elected adult members, a practice mentioned by several respondents as helping them to be effective representatives and to feel a sense of equal treatment. Several also noted that their questions were answered quickly and board members took the time to explain issues. Even with these supports, some participants found it difficult to keep up with the pace of the meetings and the complexity of the regulations and other information needed to participate meaningfully. The majority, though, felt able to participate in discussions and cast informed advisory votes.

**Equal Treatment.** In addition to reflecting on equal access to information, respondents appreciated being included in roll call and voting procedures.

**Additional Learning Activities for Youth Members.** Participants valued the opportunity to learn and connect outside of the committee meetings. Group sessions for all of the youth members afforded opportunities to develop a more comprehensive view of local government and were easier environments for engagement for some members. Participants also reported that opportunities to experience different aspects of government through a tour and a police ride-along were valuable learning experiences.

**Authenticity.** Respondents were somewhat divided on whether they were able to authentically participate and represent the voice of youth. Some saw it as an opportunity to be a participant in the decision-making process rather than just an observer, while others said they were more silent observers. Whether participating fully or observing, participants

overwhelmingly valued the learning experience as an opportunity to see what they learn about in school play out in the real world.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

### **Benefits to Participants**

Youth engagement is strongest when youth are provided opportunities to become actively involved and feel valued. Youth In Governance members have benefitted from the opportunity to serve on county board committees and contribute in a meaningful way. They are participating in the local legislative policymaking process firsthand. This is a learning opportunity that most adults never experience. Exposing youth to elements of civic engagement at a young age will likely deepen their appreciation and understanding of our democratic process as they become an adult. One YIG member summed up their experience nicely, “YIG has taught me to be a more active member of the Kenosha community. It has opened my eyes to the decisions being made that affect the daily life of members of the community, including myself. I feel less apathetic and more involved in my own life and in my future. I have the power to make a difference, and try to stay updated on current events.”

Critical skills for the 21st century workforce include critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. Youth In Governance members are provided opportunities to enhance these skills through their monthly participation on county board committees. They participate in discussions, contribute ideas to addressing local problems and work collaboratively with adults. The students gain real life experiences that build their capacity for critical thinking, problem solving and enhance their communication skills.

### **Role of Elected Officials**

Having an identified champion or champions from the board or other key stakeholder group is critical for program success. The champion(s) provide a vision and the energy to move the program forward while allowing UW-Extension staff the opportunity to facilitate, coordinate, evaluate and advise.

The elected board members are very willing to contribute to the civic education of young people in the community. They invested considerable time in selecting and supporting youth members of committees. This investment gives them a sense of ownership of the program that is supportive of program sustainability. Youth participants reported an increased connection to their communities and trust in elected officials. These positive attachments may contribute to their future choices to live and invest in Kenosha County. In an environment where communities are concerned about brain drain and the loss of talented young people, this type of program may make a difference.

Though it is beyond the scope of the current study, the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors benefit from the Youth In Governance members participation. County Board Supervisors who range in age from 33 - 73 are exposed to new youthful ideas and diverse perspectives they often have not considered. As the demographics of the county changes it's valuable for the County Board Supervisors to interact with and learn from Generation Z.

### **Selection and Inclusion Issues**

The Kenosha County Youth In Governance program used a comprehensive recruitment and selection process in order to identify program participants. Program staff made efforts to recruit applicants from throughout a diverse county and succeeded in attracting applicants from

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11 of the 13 county high schools during the three years included in this evaluation. The parameters of the program were established to be inclusive, with a relatively low minimum G.P.A. requirement of 2.5 (4.0 scale.) However, the average G.P.A. of selected program participants was greater than one full point over the requirement, showing that the program is fairly exclusive. Those selected for the final roster were high achievers in academic and other traditional leadership domains. In order to create a more inclusive program, additional variables may need to be introduced in the recruitment and selection matrix (Appendix B).

The Kenosha County YIG program was successful in having a large amount of nominations (over 100) submitted annually for the fourteen available positions because of the strong partnerships with the public and private schools who submitted the majority of names. As with any program that has a large pool of interested candidates, the selection process for the Kenosha County YIG program became increasingly competitive and exclusive.

### **Learning Environment**

Although several efforts were established to prepare youth to serve on a Kenosha County Board Committee, youth participants felt that they were not always prepared and/or confident enough to make meaningful contributions in those committee meetings. Although this is an issue for some youth participants, it would also be an issue for some newly elected Kenosha County Board Supervisors and may just need to be accepted as a limitation of the program.

As in any educational environment, relationships are essential to learning. The work that program implementers and elected officials did to provide mentors, welcoming environments, and social support among peers was essential to youth feeling comfortable in an alien and sometimes intimidating setting.

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The committee environment provides a social learning environment where young people can observe and participate flexibly depending on their competence, confidence and motivation. When youth presence is accepted by elected officials, who bring considerable expertise to the work at hand, the program has created a zone of legitimate peripheral participation which brings new members into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Even the youth who reported feeling like they had too little knowledge and experience to participate reported significant learning, though they may have felt like they did not achieve what was expected of them. As the young people are potential full participants in this setting, should they choose to run for office, moving from observer toward novice participation is an important learning experience.

In addition to youth becoming more civically engaged and gaining valuable skills and confidence, evidence from this evaluation suggests that youth participants have become more likely to run for office one day. This satisfies one of the frequently expressed reasons county board members want to bring young people into the process. Participants strengthen their interest in politics and knowledge of local issues, feel more connected to their communities, and, perhaps most importantly, develop a deep appreciation for the commitment of most local officials to the well-being of the community. Such outcomes are heartening to those who care about participatory democracy and local government.

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## BACKGROUND

Youth leadership development is critical in building civic capacity and long-term community sustainability in Kenosha County. 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 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.

Data from a local Search Institute survey in 2006 documented that only 23% of youth perceive that their communities value youth and only 27% believe that youth are given useful roles in the community. These results were among the lowest of all the assets measured in the survey and were lower than similar assets measured at the national level.

Kenosha County and Kenosha County government value the youth of our community. In response to the lack of leadership opportunities for Kenosha County youth as reported in the 2006 Search Institute survey, the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors have developed the Youth In Governance (YIG) program.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Youth In Governance program is to create a model of youth empowerment within Kenosha County, through direct participation in local government. The overall goal is to bring the youth voice to community issues and concerns while fostering the development of confident, independent, and motivated youth leaders.

Youth participating in Youth In Governance will be selected to sit on each of nine the Kenosha County Board Committees:

- **Administration** – Oversees matters related to personnel.
- **Building & Grounds** – Oversight of all county occupied buildings.
- **Extension Education & Conservation** – Oversees matters relating to the University of Wisconsin-Extension office.
- **Finance** – Oversees all matters related to finances, purchasing, budgets, and taxes.
- **Highway & Parks** – Oversight of matters related to highways, roads, dams, parks, recreation, and Dept. Public Works
- **Human Services** – Oversees all matters relating to community health, aging services, Brookside, public welfare, child support and Dept Human Services.
- **Judiciary & Law** – Oversight of all matters related to law enforcement, court system, Sheriff's Dept., Office of Juvenile Intake, Emergency Services, Medical Examiner & District Attorney.
- **Land Use** – Addresses all matters related to land use planning, zoning, shore land and floodplain issues, subdivision control, sanitation and Dept. of Planning & Development.
- **Legislative** – Oversight of all matters relating to the policies and rules of procedure of the County Board, intergovernmental relations and communications, proposed legislation and Corporation Counsel office.

## LENGTH OF TERM

Youth members will serve a one-year term (May - April each year). There are no term limits, but returning members must follow the full application process in order to re-apply.

## MEMBERSHIP

The proposed Youth In Governance program will consist of a maximum of 18 youth members. No more than two youth members will serve on a county board committee. The requirements to participate in the Youth In Governance are:

- Must be a high school student between the ages of 16-18
- Must have a GPA of 2.5 or greater
- Must be a Kenosha County resident
- Must be able to attend the monthly meetings
- Must be able to attend additional committee meetings that are combined with other committees

Kenosha County Board committee meetings are held in a professional, formal manner, based on Robert's Rules of Order. Each youth member will have a non-binding advisory vote on the committee. The youth members will be included in all open session discussions and votes at the committee level; however, they will not be provided an opportunity for participation in the debate on the County Board floor. Youth members will not be paid a stipend or mileage for attending meetings.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Prospective youth members will be required to fill out a written application. The application consists of basic contact information, school, GPA, and short answer questions about their intended objectives for the Youth In Governance program and how the program will increase their civic awareness and leadership skills. The application will include a written recommendation from a school staff member or a Kenosha County Board Supervisor.

A committee convened by the Kenosha County UW-Extension office will do selection of youth members which may include an interview. The Extension Education Committee will recommend youth members to the Youth In Governance program for appointment by the County Board Chairman to the selected county board committee.

## MENTORS

One member from each county board committee will serve as a mentor to the Youth In Governance youth committee member(s). The mentor's role is to offer support and guidance to Youth In Governance youth member throughout their tenure on the committee.

## RECOGNITION

Each April Youth In Governance members will be recognized for their contributions.

The Kenosha County Extension Education Committee will recognize both youth and mentors by hosting a reception and provide YIG members a certificate of appreciation and a letter of achievement from the Kenosha County Board Chairman.



**Kenosha County Youth in Governance**  
Kenosha County UW-Extension  
19600 - 75<sup>th</sup> Street, P.O. Box 550, Bristol, WI 53104-0550  
262-857-1945 – <http://kenosha.uwex.edu/>



*Kenosha County Youth In Governance is a program of Kenosha County UW-Extension in partnership with the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors. University of Wisconsin, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties cooperating. An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and American with Disabilities (ADA) requirements.*

*Special thanks to Washburn County UW-Extension for providing the framework for this application.*



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Bristol, WI 53104  
262-857-1945  
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## APPLICATION

**Please hand write (print) this form. NO typing or additional sheets allowed.**

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ M.I. \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Birthdate: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M F Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnicity (circle one):** 1) Hispanic 2) Non Hispanic

**Race (circle one):** 1) White 2) Black 3) Alaskan/Am. Ind. 4) Asian 5) Hawaiian/Pac. Island 6) White & Black  
7) White & Alaskan/Am, Ind. 8) Black & Alaskan/Am. Ind. 9) White & Asian 10) Other

1. Why are you interested in being a youth representative on one of the Kenosha County Board's Committees?

2. Rank your interest in Kenosha County Board Committees – 1<sup>st</sup> greatest interest – 6<sup>th</sup> least interest.

_____ Administration	_____ Human Services
_____ Buildings & Grounds	_____ Judiciary & Law
_____ Extension Education & Conservation	_____ Land Use
_____ Finance	_____ Legislative
_____ Highway & Parks	

3. Describe the skills you possess that will help you serve your community as a representative on a Kenosha County Board Committee.

4. How would you as a student representative benefit from serving on a Kenosha County Board Committee?

5. How would the Kenosha County Board and the community benefit from your representation on a county committee?

6. Describe any experience you have working with youth or adults in a decision-making capacity.

7. List school and community activities you participate in.

8. If selected, will you be able to serve for one year and commit your time and energy to this important role?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No I grant the University of WI Board of Regents and University of WI-Extension (hereinafter University), the right to use, publish, and copyright my child's image (including audio, moving image or photograph) for educational programs, website, and promotion of University programs. The University adheres to all Federal and State laws associated with this use.

I **do not** want the University of Wisconsin-Extension to reveal my child's name, address, or telephone number as part of a public record or list.

I want UW-Extension to be aware of the following disability:\_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant Signature:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

I, Parent/Guardian (Print Name):\_\_\_\_\_ acknowledge that youth participating in Youth In Governance will complete an evaluation of the program.

**Parent/Guardian Signature:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE SEND COMPLETED APPLICATION FORM AND REFERENCE FORM BY FEBRUARY 15, 2008, TO:**



**Kenosha County Youth in Governance**  
Kenosha County UW-Extension  
19600 - 75<sup>th</sup> Street, P.O. Box 550, Bristol, WI 53104-0550  
262-857-1945 – <http://kenosha.uwex.edu/>



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## REFERENCE FORM

Name of Youth Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

As part of the process for selecting youth representatives on various Kenosha County Board Committees, the Selection Committee is seeking recommendation and information for each candidate. Please provide us your input regarding the following areas:

	<u>Unknown</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
• Leadership qualities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Maturity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Interest in service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Responsibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Positive attitude	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide additional comments in the space below:

Print Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

**THIS FORM IS TO BE RETURNED TO THE CANDIDATE IN A SEALED ENVELOPE FOR SUBMISSION ALONG WITH THEIR APPLICATION.**



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**THANK YOU!**



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# INTERVIEW RATING FORM

*Note: this form could be shared with applicant!*

Applicant \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Written Application</b>	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Can express him/herself clearly				
Is well-rounded (participates in many different activities)				
Displays leadership abilities/skills				
Indicates openness and willingness to learn and experience new things				

<b>Face to Face Interview</b>	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Can express him/herself clearly				
Is well-rounded (participates in many different activities)				
Displays leadership abilities/skills				
Indicates openness and willingness to learn and experience new things				

**QUESTIONS** *(please feel free to modify these questions based on your individual style)*

1. Why are you interested in participating in the Youth in Governance program?
2. What do you know about Kenosha County government?
3. How would you benefit from participating in this program?
4. Youth participating in this program have to be highly committed. Please comment on your commitment level.
5. What are your future plans?

**FINAL RECOMMENDATION** *(please circle)*

**Recommend**

**Recommend with Reservation**

**Do not Recommend**

# KENOSHA COUNTY YOUTH IN GOVERNANCE PROGRAM EVALUATION

Please check the most appropriate box for each statement. Note that for each statement there is a “Before Participating in YIG” section and an “After Participating in YIG” section.

Before Participating in YIG					Civic Engagement	After Participating in YIG				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
					I am knowledgeable about Kenosha County government					
					I am aware of local issues that affect Kenosha County					
					My opinion can make a difference in the community					
					I am interested in politics					
					I have a useful role in the community					
					I feel a strong connection to Kenosha County					

Before Participating in YIG					Leadership Skills	After Participating in YIG				
Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability		Unsure	No Ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Excellent Ability
					I can participate in group discussions with adults					
					I can speak confidently before a group of adults					
					I can see issues from multiple perspectives					
					I can share new ideas with others					
					I can talk knowledgeably with others about local issues					
					I can be a resource to people in Kenosha County					

Please answer the following questions. You may add additional pages if necessary.

**One goal of the Kenosha County Youth In Governance program is to create an environment that is conducive to the positive development of youth voice and youth engagement. Do you feel the YIG program accomplished this goal? Why?**

**Another goal of the Kenosha County Youth In Governance program is that the program would provide youth with skills, knowledge and experiences to prepare them for future leadership opportunities. Do you feel the YIG program accomplished this goal? Why?**

**What has been the most important thing you have gained from participation in the Kenosha County Youth In Governance program?**

*Developed by John de Montmollin, Associate Professor, Department of Youth Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension, April 2011*



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