



A service of the Children's Bureau - A member of the T/TA Network
NRCYD
 National Resource Center
 for Youth Development

from the **Youth Leadership Toolkit** by NRCYD

Member Outreach

what is **OUTREACH**?

Your group has an important overall mission or purpose. You can see that members are experiencing personal growth. Now you want to expand and get more youth in care to join. You know that you need to build and strengthen your group and recruit new members, young people in care and supportive adults who have shared beliefs, experiences and values. How will you find these new members? How can you get them to join? The answer is **OUTREACH**, marketing to a select group of people to convince them to join your cause.

**Power your efforts
 with a strong
 outreach plan!**

why is it **IMPORTANT**?

It's exciting to be part of a growing group of young people with a common cause or interest. New members inject new ideas and viewpoints to keep your discussions fresh and lively and your goals more realistic. If your organization doesn't grow, members may get bored and drop off, or simply "age-out" of your group. New members can press your group's "go" button.

Also, new members are spirit builders. They expand the support and boost the confidence of each person in the group. It is also important to

continuously recruit new members so that your organization will sustain overtime.

Finally, as membership grows, your group's skill and knowledge pool gets wider and deeper and you'll see many more of your goals accomplished. Achieving goals is a little like building a house. Doing all the work yourself can take forever. Putting up a building with help of a lot of people with different skills and knowledge can get that house finished in turbo time.

OUTREACH delivers!

understanding **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Outreach and member recruitment is an ongoing process — not a one time effort — to engage youth and supportive adults.

The outreach or marketing you do to attract new group members must consider the “demographics” of your target group. “Demographics” are characteristics like age, gender, education, interests, habits, etc. of the young people you are trying to interest. Outreach takes time, effort, and often money. So, it is important to know exactly who you want to attract. If you want to invite some younger members because 80% of your group is 17-18

years old, age might impact where you recruit and what your messages are.

Challenge question: What are the demographics of your group?

Challenge question: If your group is made up of foster care youth and 80% of your members are girls, how might this impact your recruitment efforts? Where might you recruit? What sort of messages would appeal?

what's your **GOAL?**

Before you begin your outreach, or recruitment strategy, your core team needs to outline the purpose and goals of your group. In the future, young people with similar goals will want to join in.

As a group, you should identify some of the following: What are the overall

needs we want to address? What problems can we help fix in the coming years? What do we want to accomplish next month, this year? How will new members help our group achieve its purpose? What do we want to be known for? Will you need an application process?

As the leader or core team, it's up to you to define roles and communicate them so members can feel empowered to participate in meaningful ways. Leadership roles, committees, speaking opportunities, community outreach: these are all ways to give members a sense of accomplishment.

what's the **INCENTIVE?**

Outreach includes inviting new recruits to a group meeting. You can offer incentives like food, raffles, social outings like camping trips or movie nights, or “bring a friend” nights. At your meeting, provide an upbeat, inviting social atmosphere, but one that takes your group's goals seriously. New attendees should feel that there is something special happening at your meetings. You may want to put on community activities like collecting school supplies for children in care or

mentoring younger children. These offer inspiration to potential members. Invite newcomers to join in.

Challenge question: Think about some of the groups you belong to. Why did you join?

Challenge question: Brainstorm a list of non-monetary incentives for joining a group (for example, making friends, learning life skills).

It can become easy to begin to rely solely on the same group of reliable, capable young leaders. Life happens and these leaders will eventually grow up and move on. Help your group stay focused on the need to do continuous outreach.

TARGETING your outreach efforts...

Your outreach includes spreading the word about your great youth group. Everyone is familiar with TV and billboard messaging, but the cost of this kind of sweeping advertising is way too expensive for youth boards with limited funds. There are many more effective and much less expensive ways to let your community know about your group.

Word of Mouth

Just by telling someone who then tells more people, and those people tell more of their friends, you can really reach a lot of people. This is called grass roots outreach. The internet and cell phones can make spreading the word even easier and faster. Are you more likely to believe something your friend tells you is really making a difference or something you hear on the radio?

1:1 Outreach

What do we mean by 1-to-1 outreach? It is simply people talking to people about your group's cause. This can be done face-to-face, by phone, through email, on social networking sites like Facebook, and also through regular mail.

Targeted Marketing

While sending a mailing to the entire general population might not be cost effective, you could use that same mailing to target specific people and you could have a winning strategy. For example, maybe your local foster care agency could provide a list of foster and group homes in the area, and you could send fliers to each one, inviting young people to join your group.

Leveraging Supportive Adults

The truth is that supportive adults can help move your youth group towards its goals. With the benefit of experience, adults bring a complementary kind of expertise to your activities. They can help with financial matters, safety, ethical or legal concerns, organizational details, and a lot of important community networking. Adults associated with your group can also provide important mentoring for members.

Include Adults

Within a positive youth/adult partnership adults can help support youth goals. Have youth participate or co-facilitate trainings and events. Let youth talk about the group, its cause, and what adults can do to assist the group.

Think about the different organizations that you could link to recruit members for your group.



RETENTION matters

Retaining your existing and new members should be a big part of your game plan for growing your group and building support for your cause. Most people would consider a recruitment rate of five new members per month for a youth board to be highly successful. But imagine if you were to recruit five new members each month only to have seven members walk away from the group because they lose interest or no longer feel engaged. All of your focus and attention on the recruitment end could still leave

you with a shrinking group. As you recruit new people, it's important to consistently focus on member retention.

For people to want to be a part of your group, they need to feel as though what they are saying and doing are really making a difference. Be consistent in offering opportunities for members to become involved. Be sure to keep the members of your group involved and feeling like they matter!

Challenge question: What is the retention rate for your group? For example, what percentage of your members are still active after six months? How about after one year?

Challenge question: Does your group have an expected attrition rate? For example, do you expect to lose a certain number of people each year because they become too old to participate?

COMMUNICATION is key

Once you've made an investment in outreach and attracted new people to your group, it's critical to have a communication plan to keep them engaged.

Look for natural opportunities to communicate, like birthdays and holidays. It's always nice to have someone remember you - and recognizing your members offers a nice opportunity to make them feel part of the group.

Someone in your group will need to maintain an updated member list. The list may include lots of personal information about the members of your group, so it is a big responsibility to keep that information safe. Just as you would not want someone sharing your personal information without your approval, so it is critical to keep everyone's information protected. Consider asking for help from

a supportive adult in keeping member information confidential.

New technology makes it possible to communicate in lots of different ways: e-mail, Facebook, Google groups, texting, twitter. But remember, you can use technology in combination with other communication strategies: mail, phones, fliers.

Challenge question: Who keeps your group's information currently? What would happen if that person unexpectedly became unable to fill this role? Does someone else have access? Would the information stay safe?

Challenge question: What ways are working for you now to stay in touch? What is not working so well? What can be done to address what is not working?



leveraging **TECHNOLOGY**

Your group's outreach efforts can use technology very effectively. Naturally you will use technology to communicate with members, but it's also a great tool to recruit new members to your group. You can email, make phone calls and also use social networks or other web-based programs that can help with information sharing. Check out some possibilities below:

Facebook – Social networking sites like Facebook are great ways to communicate. You can send messages, and you can create a page specifically for your group. You can even set up a way for people to make donations to support your activities!

Website - Create a presence on the internet for your group. Google Applications like Sites and Blogger can help your group get on the internet fast and for free. The Calendar application lets you post your upcoming activities for all to see. For a nominal amount, you can buy your group's domain name.

FosterClub – Youth groups can now join the FosterClub Network and gain access to a whole lineup of benefits (it's free to join). Build a website for your group hosted on FosterClub.com, which includes social networking features and the ability to have a public and private members-only area. In addition, you'll have access to leadership training webinars, fundraising tools, and more. www.fosterclub.com.

Basecamp – This is a place where you can store files and information and have other members have access to those files. This is a great way to keep track of what is going on and keeping track of who is doing what. You can set milestones and assign those tasks to certain people. You can also choose who gets access to what parts of your organization's Basecamp. www.basecampHQ.com

Google Apps – With Google Applications you can share spreadsheets and information with large quantities of people. There is a calendar function where everyone can update their schedules and give everyone access to see who could be available for different opportunities. www.googleapps.com

Free conference call lines, Skype, GoToMeeting, and Adobe Connect – are great ways to conduct meetings if your group's members are spread over long distances. Virtual meetings, like on Adobe Connect (which carries a fee), allows group members to video chat. You can also IM, share files, and document notes LIVE through a virtual meeting hosted through Adobe Connect (there are many other products available, too). Check online for one of the many sites that offer free conference call lines.

Great resources from the National Resource Center for Youth Development:

Visit www.nrcyd.ou.edu and check out:

The state-by-state pages list Youth Advisory Boards. Make sure your information is updated.

Youth Leadership Listserv - sign up to keep up-to-date with the latest resources, conferences, trainings, and youth and adult dialogue.

For more information about services available through the National Resource Center for Youth Development, e-mail nrcyd@ou.edu

build your **OUTREACH PLAN**

“To me being a Youth Leader means setting an example for others to follow. I feel that as a youth leader it is my responsibility to develop younger members to become more effective advocates, and keep youth voice strong. It also means developing and working effectively with community partners to achieve positive outcomes and create positive changes in foster care.”

— Eric, TN

How will outreach benefit your group or cause?

What are your current demographics?

Who are you targeting with your outreach? Is this consistent with your group’s membership requirements and guidelines?

Why would someone want to join your group or cause? What will they get out of it? How does this tie-in with your mission statement?

Rate your current retention effort or plan. How could you improve?

Do you have a recruitment announcement? A member application? Do you have other tools your group needs to produce to help with recruitment?

What are some cost-effective ways to recruit members for your group? Remember to list ideas that are financially smart and cost effective!

Next steps... based on what you’ve discovered, what are the three most important action items to improve your outreach strategy?

Photos in this publication are Copyright © 2011 FosterClub, the national network of young people in foster care. www.fosterclub.org.