



**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER**  
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN  
FINDING PERMANENCY



# DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

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# Introduction

This guide provides an overview of Youth Advisory Board (YAB) design components. The guide is organized around key design components, with examples from States across the country to illustrate different approaches. A range of examples are provided that highlight diverse and instructive models of the various ways YABs have been structured. Each section describes approaches that states have used in practice, offering jurisdictions a menu of options to consider when developing or strengthening their own YABs.

Descriptive information about state YABs was gathered through interviews conducted with state YAB administrators and contractors from 8 states, conducted from October – December 2024. Examples provided here are based on the information shared during these interviews. While these examples serve as illustrations of potential YAB structures and operations, it is important to note that they may not reflect current state practices.

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## WHAT IS A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD?

Youth Advisory Boards are structured groups of young people with lived experience in foster care or child welfare who partner with agencies, organizations, and leaders to improve policies, practices, and services. YABs create ongoing opportunities for young people to share their perspectives, provide feedback, and help shape decisions that affect children and families involved in the child welfare system. In addition, YABs build skills in self-advocacy, leadership, and teach young people to use their voices to speak up for themselves and others.



# YAB Design Components

## 1. STRUCTURE OF YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS

The structure of a Youth Advisory Board refers to how it is organized across the State and how youth participation is supported. YABs may operate as a single statewide group, a network of regional boards, or a hybrid of both. States typically choose a structure based on geography, the distribution of youth in care, and their capacity to support regional engagement.

### Structure Options

- » No formal organization – instead, a series of statewide or regional events open to all eligible youth
- » Statewide organization only
- » Regional organization only
- » Combination of State and regional organizations, with regional representatives designated to serve on State organization

### State Examples

#### **CALIFORNIA: County Chapter Model**

California Youth Connection is organized around county-based chapters, with each county selecting two representatives to serve on the State advisory board. Core organizers support and convene youth at the local level, with the goal of preparing young people to become effective advocates and leaders. At the State level, representatives vote on the priorities for Capitol Day and are given time to consult with youth in their counties so they can cast informed votes on behalf of those they represent.

#### **CONNECTICUT: Integrated State and Regional Model**

Connecticut operates both a State YAB and six regional boards. Each regional board designates six representatives to participate in statewide efforts focused on a shared initiative. Social work staff coordinate logistics and provide transportation, while youth take the lead in hosting State meetings—decorating the space and facilitating sessions when meetings rotate through their regions. In addition, youth meet quarterly with the Commissioner and the agency's leadership team.

## 1. STRUCTURE OF YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS

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### **OHIO: Flexible County and State Structure**

Ohio operates both a State YAB and county- or regional-level boards, though not every county currently has one. The State YAB—Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB)—serves young people ages 14 to 24 who have experienced out-of-home care, including foster care, kinship care, adoption, group homes and residential facilities. It functions as a statewide organization, and its leadership is composed of representatives from county and regional YABs. All 88 counties are invited, but not required, to establish a local or regional board. At the county level, youth determine their own structure and tailor it to fit their community's needs.

### **ILLINOIS: Regional Officers Form State Board**

Illinois has operated a YAB since 1994, and it was codified into law in 2014. They maintain a statewide board and four regional boards. The regional officers automatically constitute the statewide YAB. Youth at statewide meetings hold retreats to determine priority initiatives, with Loyola School of Law conducting background research on possible initiatives. Officers take information from their regional level to bring to State level votes.

### **MAINE: Low-Barrier Statewide and Regional Model**

Maine operates both statewide and regional youth engagement structures through the University of Southern Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT). Rather than functioning as a typical board, these structures offer an open and welcoming space where any young person in foster care can join meetings and connect with peers. The focus is on building community, amplifying youth voice, and supporting young people as they navigate their journeys.



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## 2. FUNDING SOURCES FOR YAB ACTIVITIES

Understanding funding sources helps inform decisions about eligible activities, participant eligibility, and sustainability. Funding decisions for YAB activities often require input from program, fiscal, and leadership staff. Involving the Chafee Coordinator, Title IV-E specialist, fiscal/budget staff, and the YAB coordinator/youth engagement lead early in the discussion can help identify allowable funding sources, clarify participant eligibility, and support long-term sustainability.

### Common Funding Sources

- » Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood funds
- » State general funds
- » Title IV-E funds (with restrictions on use)
- » Private foundation support (Casey Family Programs, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative)
- » In-kind contributions (venues, food from community partners)

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Mixed Funding Based on Activity**

Maine uses a combination of State funds, Chafee funds, and Title IV-E funding, with different sources applied depending on the activity. For example, when youth provide training to case-workers, they use IV-E funds because Chafee funds cannot be used for that purpose.

#### **NEBRASKA: State and Foundation Partnership**

Nebraska uses a combination of State funds for the citizen review panel contracts and private foundation funds from the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFE), the Sherwood Foundation, and the Scott Foundation. Local boards are funded through community collaboratives, with NCFE providing funds to these collaboratives. They also utilize Chafee and IV-E funding for youth-focused work throughout the state.

#### **CONNECTICUT: Chafee with Shift to Contracted Model**

Connecticut uses all Chafee funds, but it plans to seek State funds to finance participation for youth who do not meet Chafee qualifications. Regional YABs can order food, decorations, and supplies for meetings from the Chafee program. The State provides a limited amount of funding per year to each region for all regional activities related to positive youth outcomes. As of December 2024, the program shifted to contracted agencies that receive funding per site for transportation, meetings, and to hire facilitators (preferably with lived experience).

## 2. FUNDING SOURCES FOR YAB ACTIVITIES

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### **OHIO: Limited State Funds with Strategic Partnerships**

The state of Ohio provides funding that can be used for youth stipends and youth leadership opportunities, including workshop supplies. These state funds cannot be used for food, logo shirts, or lobbying. The board routinely seeks donated venues and meal sponsors, and partners with other organizations to meet those needs. For example, the Ohio Supreme Court sponsors food for statewide quarterly OHIO YAB meetings. For county and regional YABs, the State allocates funding to support YAB activities, with counties determining how the funds are used in partnership with youth members.

### **HAWAII: Private and Public Funds**

The YAB is funded primarily through private funders and partially by the Department of Human Services Child Welfare Services. Each board manages a pool of privately funded grant dollars used to support youth-centered events, such as Teen Day in Court or holiday sibling connection gatherings that are open to young people in foster care. Board members are responsible for planning these events and collaborating with community partners.

### **ILLINOIS: Three-Year State Contract**

Be Strong Families has a 3-year contract with Illinois to facilitate the YAB program, with a specific allocation of funds for each statewide meeting. All regional and State board activities are funded through this contract.

### **CALIFORNIA: Substantial State Investment**

California receives significant funding each year from the State for stipends and operations. California has a legislative mandate requiring the State to support the California Youth Connection, ensuring ongoing financial support. This substantial investment reflects California's commitment to youth voice in system improvement and their large foster care population.



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## 3. MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

Management and staffing refer to the adult roles, responsibilities, and supports that make it possible for YABs to operate effectively. This includes those who coordinate meetings and activities, support and mentor youth members, handle logistics and communication, manage funding and stipends, and ensure that youth input is connected to decision-making within the child welfare system. Effective YABs require dedicated adult support – whether through State agency staff, contracted organizations, or nonprofit partners – and the management approach directly affects sustainability, youth–adult partnerships, and the board’s ability to achieve its goals.

### Management Models

- » Direct State agency management
- » University partnership
- » Contracted nonprofit organization
- » Youth-led nonprofit with State funding
- » Volunteer-based facilitation with State coordination

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: University Partnership Model**

Maine contracts with the University of Southern Maine’s Catherine Cutler Institute to provide the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT). This partnership has existed since 1988 and has been renewed every 5 years through an RFP process. The Catherine Cutler Institute is operated by a team of five facilitators who organize and facilitate monthly statewide meetings. The model emphasizes youth-adult partnership in organizing meetings and conferences, with strong youth involvement in planning. In addition, given the challenges of being a rural State, with very rural districts, each district has local Youth Transition Specialists, employed by Maine’s Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), who work with youth in their areas.

#### **NEBRASKA: Foundation-Based Coordination**

Nebraska’s model is led by the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), who leads the Connected Youth Initiative. Local youth boards have leaders who are champions for the youth. These champions may be social workers, youth ministers, or other adults willing to dedicate 10 to 20 hours a week to work with the local boards.

### 3. MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

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#### **CONNECTICUT: Transition to Contracted Model**

Previously, the YAB was coordinated directly by State agency staff, who were responsible for all aspects of facilitation, logistics, and youth support. Over time, this proved to be beyond the agency's capacity to sustain. In December 2024, the State transitioned to a partnership model where YAB coordination is contracted to a community-based case management agency. Under this approach, five sites support youth participation across the State's six regions. Community partners who already work directly with young people help facilitate meetings, support youth in agenda planning and preparation, and ensure consistent adult support. Social workers assist with transportation to meetings and manage youth stipends and payments.

#### **HAWAII: Board Advisors as Key Staff**

EPIC 'Ohana houses the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board and employs board advisors as paid staff up to 20 hours per month. Hawai'i emphasizes that board advisors are instrumental in the success of the operations of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board. Three of the five advisors have lived experience themselves, and three are previous board members who now mentor and support current members.



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## 4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Although they may vary by State, eligibility criteria define who can participate in a YAB, including age ranges, foster care experience, and whether young people must have an open case or may participate as alumni. Clear eligibility guidelines help States balance inclusion with purpose. These decisions shape not only who is at the table, but also the continuity, leadership development, and sustainability of the YAB over time.

### Common Eligibility Components

- » Age requirements (often 14–24, though some States vary)
- » Current or past experience in foster care or out-of-home care
- » Requirement for an open case versus inclusion of alumni
- » Formal membership expectations versus open or drop-in participation

States may have additional eligibility criteria not listed here.

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Age 14 and Up with Junior Track**

There is no formal membership requirement; youth may attend meetings at their discretion once they reach age 14. These individuals learn about YLAT and are recruited by their case worker or Youth Transition Specialist. The State has also developed a junior YLAT model for youth ages 11 to 13 to engage children at an earlier age. Currently, there are three groups statewide who offer a Junior YLAT model.

#### **MISSOURI: Chafee Eligibility with Advisory Roles**

Missouri requires youth to be at least 14 years old to participate in the YAB due to Chafee funding requirements. Youth remain eligible to serve as long as they qualify for Chafee services (up to age 21). The board also includes two ex officio members over age 21 who serve as advisors to the youth. To join, youth must attend one meeting, submit an application, receive a recommendation from their local Chafee provider, and be members of their local YAB.

#### **CONNECTICUT: Open Case Requirement with Alumni Options**

Connecticut's regional YABs are open to any young people ages 14 to 23 with an open foster care case. At case closure, they are no longer active YAB members but can continue as volunteer members if they wish. The State is seeing growing interest in alumni staying involved even without compensation.

#### 4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

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##### **HAWAII:** Extended Eligibility Through Age 26

Hawaii's HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board is made up of young people with lived experience ages 14 to 26, with board members aging off the board at age 26. Board members fill out a short application and have a brief interview with the board and the board's advisor. If it's a good fit and they are believed to be committed to serving, they are brought onto the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board.



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## 5. MEMBER RECRUITMENT AND APPLICATION PROCESSES

The ways young people learn about and join a YAB vary considerably across States. Some YABs operate with an open-attendance approach that allows youth to attend freely, while others use more formal application and selection processes. Recruitment strategies and application requirements influence who participates, how prepared youth are for the experience, and the overall balance between accessibility, commitment, and representation.

Thoughtful recruitment approaches help ensure that a diverse group of youth with lived experience has the opportunity to participate. They also shape how youth understand the purpose of the YAB and what is expected of them as members.

### Recruitment Approaches

- » Caseworkers share information directly with eligible youth
- » Annual in-person or virtual recruitment events
- » Word-of-mouth outreach by current YAB members
- » Outreach through congregate care providers and residential programs
- » Community partners helping to identify and encourage potential members

### State Examples

#### MAINE: Open Attendance Through Transition Specialists

In Maine, recruitment is led by youth transition program staff who encourage young people to attend YLAT meetings. Youth who participate sign in at the meeting, and their names are added to a mailing list to receive information about future gatherings. There is no formal application or membership requirement; the emphasis is on reducing barriers to participation, fostering easy access, and building a sense of community.

#### NEBRASKA: Application with Board Review

Nebraska uses a peer-led application and selection process for its YAB. Young people apply with a recommendation, and current board members review applications and select new members. Appointments are for 1-year terms, with the option to renew for youth who remain in good standing, including meeting attendance expectations. Board members also partner with local community chapters to recruit youth to participate in Legislative Days, which has proven to be the program's most effective recruitment strategy. Seeing peers lead presentations often inspires youth to apply for the State board themselves.

### **MISSOURI: Attend First, Then Apply**

Missouri encourages youth to attend at least one State YAB meeting before applying for membership, allowing them to experience how the board operates and determine whether participation is a good fit. Youth who remain interested then complete an interview with the board. Applicants must also be recommended by their local Chafee provider and be active participants in their local YAB. This approach supports informed decision-making and helps ensure that youth are prepared for the commitment of board membership.

### **ILLINOIS: Guest Attendance Before Membership**

Illinois prioritizes recruitment and outreach by offering hybrid meetings to make participation more accessible. New youth are invited to attend their first two meetings as observers and are welcomed as members after their third meeting. Upon joining, youth complete a packet that includes identification and caseworker contact information to support safety planning. Regional boards may include up to 20 active members, though most maintain between 5 and 15. The overall structure is shaped by the by-laws that youth develop and approve.

The program also hosts an annual recruitment event each June that centers on relationship-building and fun activities. One ongoing challenge is the over-representation of youth from congregate care settings, as agencies can transport groups more easily than youth living in family placements.

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## 6. MEMBER COMPENSATION

Compensating youth for their time and expertise is a foundational element of effective YABs. Thoughtful compensation practices recognize that YAB participation requires preparation, travel, and sustained engagement. Payment affirms that youth contributions are valued as meaningful work and helps reduce barriers to participation for young people who may otherwise be unable to attend due to financial constraints. States use a variety of compensation models based on their funding sources, administrative processes, and program goals. These approaches range from simple stipends to more structured systems that reward consistent participation, leadership, and professional growth.

### Compensation Approaches

- » No compensation for regular meetings, with payment provided only for special events or activities
- » Hourly rates, this may vary for in-person versus virtual participation
- » Daily or per-meeting stipends
- » Tiered annual incentive systems, such as gift cards tied to attendance milestones
- » Compensation connected to professional development activities or training participation
- » Enhanced compensation for officers or other special roles

### State Examples

#### MAINE: Compensation for Training and Special Activities

Maine provides training several times each year to prepare youth for leadership and advocacy roles. After completing the training, young people are eligible to receive \$40 stipends for participating in selected activities, such as training agency staff, residential providers, or guardians ad litem; reviewing policies; or serving on the planning committee for the summer teen conference. Youth receive stipends both for their preparation of events (such as panels), as well as their participation in the event itself. Stipends are not provided for routine monthly meetings. For all compensated activities, University staff at the Catherine Cutler Institute offer comprehensive preparation and follow-up debriefing to support youth and ensure meaningful participation. Maine has also developed an ambassador track. Ambassadors receive a monthly stipend of \$80 to touch base with YLAT staff at least once a month and participate in an additional leadership activity at least once every two months. For any participation they do beyond this, they receive an additional stipend.

## 6. MEMBER COMPENSATION

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### **MISSOURI: Daily Stipends with Officer Premium**

Missouri has steadily strengthened its approach to compensating Youth Advisory Board members, increasing stipends from an initial \$25 per day to \$100 per day for members and \$150 per day for officers. Youth are compensated for participation in weekend meetings, biannual conferences, and Advocacy Day. For other activities, such as regional meetings or workgroups, youth receive \$25 for meetings lasting 3 hours or less and \$100 for meetings exceeding 3 hours. To support timely payment, Missouri established a dedicated payment request code within the state system specifically for YAB participation. This allows stipends to be processed for youth with open cases within approximately two weeks.

### **CONNECTICUT: State-Approved Stipend Rate**

Connecticut has established a compensation structure for all active Youth Advisory Board members to recognize and value their time, expertise, and lived experience. Youth are compensated at a state-approved stipend rate for every hour of verified YAB-related activity completed. Eligible activities include attendance at monthly YAB meetings and participation in enrichment opportunities such as conferences, youth panels, and other forums where members share their lived expertise and amplify youth voice. In addition, YAB members who engage in planning efforts beyond regular meetings, including organizing youth events, supporting youth conferences, or contributing to special initiatives, are also compensated for their time using the same state-approved stipend rate.

### **HAWAII: Duration-Based Payments**

Members receive stipends that reflect the time and effort they contribute. Board members are paid \$35 for meetings, trainings, or events lasting up to 3 hours, \$70 for half-day participation (4 to 6 hours), and \$140 for full-day engagement. The EPIC 'Ohana team emphasizes that HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board participation is meaningful work and believes youth should be compensated accordingly, rather than relying on informal incentives.

### **ILLINOIS: Tiered Annual Incentive Model**

Youth participation is supported through a structured incentive and stipend approach that recognizes both attendance and leadership involvement. Youth who attend meetings receive gift cards based on participation milestones: \$30 after their first three meetings, \$60 after six meetings, and \$90 after nine meetings. Attendance counts reset annually. Youth serving in leadership roles—such as ambassadors, interns, or elected officers—receive stipends for their time and contributions. These youth are paid \$50 for each regional meeting they attend, as well as for participation in external meetings with the DCF Director and other stakeholders. They receive \$30 for preparation calls and \$50 for the meetings themselves. Highly engaged youth in these roles may receive approximately \$100–\$200 per month. This approach reinforces that participation in the YAB is a meaningful commitment and that youth contributions are valued as real work.

### **CALIFORNIA: Skills-Based Professional Development Model**

California has shifted from a traditional incentive system to a professional development model that links compensation to skill-building milestones rather than attendance. Stipends are awarded for completing specific benchmarks, such as writing a grant, which earns a \$500 payment. Under the State's new cohort model, 25 emerging leaders each receive \$5,000 annually, supported by State funding dedicated to stipends. Payments are not hourly; instead, compensation is tied to quarterly accomplishments and distributed at quarterly gatherings. This approach reflects California's emphasis on compensating youth for the skills they develop and the contributions they make—not simply for showing up.



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## 7. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Leadership and governance refer to how decision-making is organized within a YAB and how youth are supported to take on leadership roles. These structures influence how meetings are run, how priorities are set, how youth represent the board in external settings, and how leadership skills are developed over time. Governance approaches also affect continuity as members transition in and out of the board and play an important role in long-term sustainability. Governance structures vary widely across states. Some YABs operate with a fully shared leadership model in which all members participate equally in decision-making. Others establish more formal leadership roles through rotating assignments or elected officer positions. In some states, regional leaders automatically serve as part of a statewide leadership group, creating a layered approach that connects local and statewide youth voice.

### Governance Models

- » No designated officers: all members share responsibility equally
- » Rotating members serving in informal or unelected leadership roles
- » Formally elected officers for a statewide YAB
- » Regional officers who collectively form the statewide YAB leadership team

### Common Officer Positions

- » President/Chair
- » Vice President/Co-Chair
- » Secretary/Recorder/Scribe
- » Media Specialist
- » Meeting Moderator

### State Examples

#### NEBRASKA: Shared Leadership with Working Groups

Nebraska's Youth Advisory Board does not use elected officer roles. At the youth's request, the group is intentionally structured so that all members have an equal voice. This makes the facilitator's role especially important in ensuring meetings stay balanced, inclusive, and productive. The board also relies on small working groups to plan activities and events, all of which are designed collaboratively by the youth. This approach fosters shared responsibility and a strong sense of fairness among members.

### **MISSOURI: Defined Officer Roles with Shared Decision-Making**

Missouri's Youth Advisory Board elects a chair, co-chair, scribe, media specialist, and a meeting moderator who helps keep discussions on track. These roles are selected by the youth through a private voting process. While officers have specific responsibilities, they do not hold additional authority—every member's voice carries equal weight. The State organizer provides oversight of the process and may intervene if concerns arise.

### **HAWAII: Traditional Officer Structure by Island**

Each of the islands of Hawai'i has its own board that makes up the statewide HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board, with membership size based on population. O'ahu typically has seven members, while Kaua'i and Maui usually have four. Officer roles include president, vice president, secretary, and historian, although smaller islands may use a streamlined structure with only a president, vice president, and other general board members. The president collaborates with the advisor to plan meeting agendas and facilitate meetings, while the advisor offers guidance, training, and support—especially when the president is new to their role.

### **ILLINOIS: Requirements and Terms for Officers**

In Illinois, youth must attend at least three meetings before running for an officer position. Candidates are required to maintain a 2.5 GPA, obtain an adult recommendation, and deliver a brief speech prior to the election. Regional officers serve 1-year terms, while State-level officers serve 2-year terms, with elections held each June.



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## 8. MEETING CADENCE AND LOGISTICS

Meeting cadence and logistics refer to how often the group meets, the format (virtual or in-person), location, length, and timing. These practical details play an important role in supporting youth participation and sustained engagement.

### Key Decisions to Consider

- » Cadence: Monthly or quarterly
- » Format: Virtual, in-person, or hybrid
- » Location: Rotating venues, central location, or regional sites
- » Duration: Evening meetings (2–3 hours) or weekend retreats
- » Supports: Meals, childcare, and accommodations

### State Examples

#### MAINE: Flexible Venues Based on Youth Population

Maine is organized into eight districts and regularly reassesses meeting locations based on the number of youth in foster care. To reduce costs, meetings have shifted from agency offices to college campuses and other community spaces such as animal shelters, churches, and community centers. Monthly meetings last 2 hours, are open to all youth with lived experience, and focus on connection and skill development rather than a single policy issue. The group often partners with community organizations or invites guest speakers for topics such as healthy friendships. January and February meetings are held virtually. Meetings are also held during summer months, with a statewide Teen Conference each June. Summer meetings focus on base building and exposing youth to traditional activities in their communities that they may not otherwise get to experience, such as blueberry picking, attending a local sporting event, and learning how to fish.

#### MISSOURI: Quarterly Weekend Retreats

Missouri's State YAB meets in person each quarter for a weekend gathering. Meetings begin at noon on Saturday with lunch at the hotel, followed by youth-led sessions in designated meeting rooms. Youth manage the agenda and facilitation, with staff present only to provide guidance and support. The chair opens each meeting and helps keep the group focused. To encourage full engagement, cell phones, iPads, and computers are not permitted during meetings for either youth or adults, unless it is for notetaking purposes. Local Chafee providers arrange transportation and remain on site with participants throughout the weekend.

### **OHIO: Quarterly with Virtual Ambassador Meetings**

Ohio's State YAB meets quarterly on the third Thursday of January, April, July, and October in Columbus, a central location for participants statewide. The Ohio Supreme Court provides lunch, and the meeting space is sponsored by another organizational partner. Between quarterly meetings, Youth Ambassadors connect virtually—typically on Sunday evenings—to continue the board's work. County and regional YABs set their own schedules and most often meet at local children's services agency offices.

### **ILLINOIS: Monthly Regional, Quarterly Statewide**

Illinois regional youth advisory groups meet monthly in a hybrid format from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Contracted staff coordinate transportation for youth to attend both regional and statewide meetings. The statewide YAB is composed of regional officers and meets quarterly for a weekend in a centrally located area that rotates among regions. These gatherings are typically held in hotel conference centers and are supervised by contracted youth engagement staff.

### **CALIFORNIA: Hybrid Meetings for Large State**

California has approximately 200 active Youth Advisory Board members who participate in monthly chapter meetings across the state. Both hybrid and in-person formats offer advantages given the long distances many youth must travel. However, maintaining engagement during a 5-hour virtual meeting can be difficult, so decisions about format are based on the purpose of each meeting. In recent feedback, members have recommended returning to in-person gatherings to support stronger engagement.

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## 9. MEETING AGENDAS AND FACILITATION

Across States, YABs differ in how meetings are planned, led, and documented. In some YABs, youth take the lead in shaping and facilitating meetings. In others, youth and adults work in partnership to manage the flow and follow-up. Documentation practices also vary –from formal minutes to informal notes – shared through different communication channels.

### Meeting Management Components

- » Agenda planning: Youth create the agenda independently or the advisor offers a menu of topics for youth to select from
- » Meeting facilitation: Youth (often officers) lead the meeting or the advisor co-facilitates alongside youth
- » Notes and minutes: Recorded by the advisor, by a youth member (such as a scribe), or developed together
- » Distribution: Notes shared electronically (email or text) or posted on a website or private social media page

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Multiple Facilitators for Regional Meetings**

The Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine employs four to five facilitators to support meetings across the State's eight districts. This multi-facilitator approach helps ensure consistent meeting quality while making it possible to engage youth in rural and geographically dispersed communities.

#### **NEBRASKA: Youth-Directed Agendas with Staff Support**

A leader from the nonprofit that sponsors the YAB facilitates Nebraska's meetings alongside a partner who records notes. Youth decide the agenda topics and identify the issues they want to address. Between meetings, the group uses an email listserv to share information and stay connected. This approach centers youth voice in shaping meeting content while providing consistent adult support for facilitation and documentation.

### **OHIO: Consistent Structure with Youth-Led Discussion**

Ohio's State YAB follows a consistent meeting flow designed by youth to help their peers know what to expect and how to participate. Youth Ambassadors open with updates on recent activities, move into small-group brainstorming, pause for a working lunch, and then reconvene to share ideas. Meetings close with a "New and Good" reflection that highlights the individual achievements of each participating youth. Youth lead the sharing and discussion throughout the day. Adults support the process by helping identify discussion topics prior to the meeting and by capturing youth insights on flip charts during the meeting. Two adults typically assist with each of the four to five Youth Breakout Sessions, with one focused on documenting activities in real time. Notes from the meeting are later incorporated into the board's quarterly reports. Regional and county YABs use formats that work best for their members, though in most cases youth shape the agendas with support from alumni or trusted adult allies.

### **HAWAI'I: President-Led with Advisor Support**

In Hawai'i, board members assist in determining the agenda and focus of each meeting and decide whether gatherings will be held in person or virtually. The board president works with the advisor to plan the agenda and leads the meeting. When someone is new to the role, the advisor provides training and may temporarily facilitate until the youth leader feels ready to lead independently. The secretary records meeting minutes. If that role is unfilled, the advisor takes on this responsibility. Minutes are shared with members by email.

### **CALIFORNIA: Youth-Led and Youth-Centered**

California maintains youth-led, youth-centered meetings. They have found that in-person meetings held during "communal times of gathering" are particularly helpful to youth, creating opportunities for connection and relationship-building alongside the business of the meeting. This approach recognizes that the social and community aspects of meetings are as important as the formal agenda items.



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## 10. PURPOSE, ACTIVITIES, AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth Advisory Boards are not defined by their meetings, but by the work youth do to influence policy, practice, and system improvement. Meetings are simply one way this work is planned, carried out, and reflected upon. Across States, YABs engage in a wide range of activities that build leadership skills while creating meaningful opportunities for youth to shape the child welfare system.

### Common YAB Activities that Advance the Purpose

- » Reviewing and providing input on policy and practice
- » Training child welfare staff, foster parents, or judges
- » Participating in legislative advocacy and Capitol days
- » Planning and hosting conferences or events
- » Serving on hiring panels or interview committees
- » Leading or participating in community service projects
- » Engaging in leadership development and skill-building opportunities

### State Examples

#### NEBRASKA: Citizen Review Panel and National Advocacy

Nebraska contracts with the State to operate a youth-focused citizen review panel on foster care that develops recommendations for the Division of Children and Family Services related to policy and practice. YAB members also represent the group at national conferences, where they share their lived experience and present to state child welfare staff on selected topics.

#### MISSOURI: Policy Review and Youth-Led Conferences

Missouri's Children's Division regularly invites State YAB members to review new and emerging policies and practices, recognizing the value of their lived experience. Youth are included in the development of policies, so they have input throughout the entire process. They also have youth participate in Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) and Children's Division workgroups to provide feedback on policy and practice. Recently, youth assisted with strengthening the Family Support Team policy to be more inclusive of youth voice. Every other year, the State YAB hosts a youth-led conference in which young people plan the agenda and deliver the presentations, while staff provide logistical support such as materials and supplies. The program also sponsors an annual Child Advocacy Day at the Capitol that is open to older youth in care statewide. Each year, the State YAB selects priority topics to focus on. For example, in a recent year, members identified access to driver's education and the steps needed to obtain a driver's license as key issues to address.

### **CONNECTICUT: Youth Consultants and Training Roles**

Connecticut provides a planning framework to help regional Youth Advisory Boards shape their agendas and connects youth to a variety of statewide leadership opportunities. These include serving on the CFSR team, acting as youth consultants with divisions focused on domestic violence, foster care, and substance use, training foster parents, and reviewing agency policies. Opportunities are publicly posted for youth to apply. Interested youth submit a letter of recommendation from their social worker, participate in a mock interview through Microsoft Teams, and are expected to present themselves professionally. The staff member sponsoring the opportunity makes the final selection from the applicant pool.

### **OHIO: Youth-Written Constitution and Flexible Priorities**

In Ohio, youth created their own constitution to define the board's purpose and the population it serves. Each year's activities are guided by the skills and interests of current members, allowing the board's work to evolve based on the strengths and passions of the youth involved. Every county and region can nominate one or more Youth Ambassadors to be part of the leadership of the board, similar to the United Nations structure.

### **HAWAII: Grant-Making and Policy Advocacy**

Each board manages a pool of privately funded grant dollars that it uses to support youth-focused events, such as Teen Day in Court or holiday sibling connections events. Youth are responsible for planning these events and partner with community organizations to support these events. Boards collaborate with Child Welfare Services to support legislation and are actively involved in related discussions. The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board has had previous success in supporting passing a number of legislation, such as the Rights of Children in Foster Care and Imua Kakou, extended foster care.

### **ILLINOIS: Leadership Development and Systems Change**

Illinois designs its Youth Advisory Board primarily as a leadership development and systems change initiative. Youth build skills in public speaking, professional boundaries, preparing and delivering presentations, and engaging effectively with decision-makers. The aim is to equip young people to create meaningful change and see the real-world impact of their efforts. Youth advocacy helped advance HB 5097, known as the hair care bill, and board members now participate in the Rules and Regulations group responsible for implementing the law. Youth are also planning an annual hair care symposium for foster parents that will include hands-on learning and makeover activities. Staff prepare youth to participate in meetings with the DCFS Director, and regional officers serve as the statewide YAB. To strengthen peer-to-peer outreach, the program offers incentives for youth to distribute copies of the Youth Bill of Rights—materials young people in care are legally entitled to receive but often do not—so more youth have access to this important information.

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## 11. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Strong communication practices help Youth Advisory Board members stay connected, informed, and engaged between meetings. Because youth may live in different regions, change placements, or have varying access to technology, YABs often use multiple communication methods to make sure information is easy to receive and participate in. Thoughtful communication also supports continuity, helping youth feel included even if they miss a meeting.

### Common Communication Tools

- » Email lists
- » Group text platforms (GroupMe, text messaging)
- » Websites (youth-developed or agency-maintained)
- » Social media (Facebook groups, YouTube channels)
- » Mobile apps
- » Virtual orientation rooms

### State Examples

#### MAINE: Website and YouTube Channel

Maine maintains a YLAT YouTube channel, a comprehensive website, social media pages (such as Facebook and Instagram), and a progressive web app, which together serve as a central hub for sharing videos, resources, and information about YLAT activities and upcoming events. YLAT also distributes a quarterly newsletter to community members and the Office of Child and Family Services and utilizes an email distribution list to advertise upcoming events.

#### NEBRASKA: Multi-Platform Approach

Nebraska uses a website, email list of members, and a Facebook Messenger group for communication. They do not use other social media due to time and resource constraints. They disseminate information about annual Legislative Days results through NCFE's existing communication channels.

#### MISSOURI: GroupMe and Email for Document Review

Missouri uses both an email list and a GroupMe chat to stay in communication with members. Staff also share forms, policies, and other materials for youth to review by a set deadline—for example, asking whether a form is clear and easy to understand.

### **OHIO: Youth-Designed Logo and Multi-Channel Communication**

Youth designed the program's logo and play an active role in communications. The board maintains a private Facebook group – accessible only to youth members and adult supporters – where quarterly reports are shared. Staff manage the website, with youth assisting and receiving stipends for their time. Information is also shared with the broader youth community through email updates, panel presentations, and youth-created videos. Communication approaches vary across regions and counties; for example, Hamilton County publishes its own newsletter.

### **HAWAII: Communication with Virtual Orientation**

Hawai'i primarily uses text and email for communication. They maintain a binder with guidelines and operating procedures. Notably, they created a virtual orientation room using Google Slides and Google Classroom that provides new members with comprehensive orientation materials they can access anytime, and their websites provide public-facing information.

### **CALIFORNIA: Professional Communications Support**

California's communication manager works with youth to develop social media content and website materials. They have committees for different focus areas including policy, and youth work with staff to implement committee work. This professional support helps ensure consistent, high-quality communication with members and the public.



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## 12. CODES OF CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY POLICIES

Clear codes of conduct help YABs create spaces where members feel safe, respected, and able to participate fully. These guidelines set shared expectations for behavior and outline how concerns will be addressed if challenges arise. Some YABs use formal written policies, while others rely on collaboratively developed meeting agreements. In both cases, the goal is the same: to promote accountability, fairness, and a positive group environment.

### Common Elements of Codes of Conduct

- » Behavioral expectations (respect for others, active participation, and appropriate communication)
- » Attendance guidelines and processes for excused absences
- » Responses to policy violations and graduated consequences when needed
- » Safety planning and supervision requirements during meetings and events
- » Meeting agreements and group norms developed with youth input

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Meeting Agreements at Each Meeting**

Maine creates meeting agreements and group norms for each district meeting with youth who attend.

#### **MISSOURI: Show Grace Policy and Board Voting**

Missouri has adopted a “show grace” policy that allows youth to attend a meeting and request understanding for the day without needing to share personal details; staff simply notify the chair and co-chair. All rules are established through youth vote, and young people set the agenda and lead all discussion topics. Performance or behavior concerns are typically minor. Each absence from a State YAB meeting is reviewed by the board and voted on as excused or unexcused, although staff retain final authority to remove a member if necessary. During weekend hotel meetings, designated chaperones—such as Chafee providers, transitional living staff, or caseworkers—are responsible for checking in with youth and ensuring their well-being.

#### **OHIO: Written Code with County Variations**

Ohio’s YAB maintains a formal Code of Conduct that is posted on its website. County and regional boards develop their own codes using the statewide version as a model, creating consistency across the system while allowing for local adaptation.

### **ILLINOIS: Living Documents Reviewed at Every Meeting**

Illinois maintains a code of conduct, discipline grid/agreement, and bylaws written by the statewide board. These are living documents that the State board edits annually. All members are charged with understanding the bylaws, and they read them at every meeting to ensure everyone stays current with expectations and any changes.

### **CALIFORNIA: Meeting Agreements**

California begins meetings with a set of agreements rather than a formal code of conduct. Examples include assume good intentions and “don’t yuck somebody’s yum”. This approach creates a positive, supportive culture through shared norms.



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## 13. ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT OF ALUMNI

Alumni – young adults with lived experience in foster care – can bring continuity, perspective, and mentorship to YABs. How States involve alumni often influences the board’s sustainability, the support available to current members, and the depth of lived-experience insight in discussions and activities.

### Ways Alumni May Be Involved

- » Full membership (when within the age eligibility range)
- » Mentor roles supporting younger members
- » Volunteer or advisory roles without formal membership
- » Paid positions as facilitators, consultants, or board advisors
- » Guest speakers or trainers for specific events or topics
- » No formal alumni role, depending on the board’s design

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Alumni Ambassadors as Mentors**

Maine allows older youth to take on mentor roles. Since the State serves young people up to age 23, older youth can serve in a guidance role to younger members as alumni ambassadors, providing peer mentoring and leadership examples within the age range served.

#### **MISSOURI: Limited Alumni Space**

Missouri does not have a formal role for foster care alumni within the State YAB, aside from two ex officio members over age 21 who serve in advisory capacities.

#### **CONNECTICUT: Alumni Engagement Within Funding Limits**

Connecticut YABs include young people up to age 23, when they age out of foster care. Many alumni express interest in staying involved, but current funding allows stipends only for youth with open cases. The State continues to share leadership and engagement opportunities with alumni; however, additional funding would be needed to compensate them as ongoing members. Alumni are welcomed back as guest speakers for YAB meetings, though they are not eligible for payment in that role.

#### **HAWAII: Alumni as Paid Board Advisors**

Hawai'i notably has several advisors who are former board members and now mentor and provide support to current members. Board advisors are compensated for up to 20 hours per month, and three of the five advisors have lived experience in child welfare. This approach creates a potential pathway from board participation to paid leadership.

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## 14. TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL SUPPORT

Reliable transportation is one of the most common barriers to consistent youth participation in YABs. Without thoughtful planning, even highly motivated youth may be unable to attend meetings and events. States address this challenge in different ways to ensure access, safety, and flexibility based on geography and individual circumstances.

### Common Transportation Solutions

- » State or agency staff provide transportation
- » Caseworkers or social workers coordinate travel arrangements
- » Contracted transportation services (e.g., rideshare or specialized providers)
- » Foster parents or caregivers provide transportation
- » Approved adult volunteers (with required background checks)
- » Air travel for multi-day or statewide events when needed
- » Virtual meeting options to reduce travel barriers

### State Examples

#### **MAINE: Strategic Meeting Locations**

Maine staff coordinate transportation to meetings and use current data, i.e., the latest youth in foster care reports, to select meeting locations, ensuring that sites are chosen to minimize travel distances for as many young people as possible.

#### **NEBRASKA: Using Virtual Access to Bridge Distance**

Nebraska's statewide board most often includes youth from the eastern part of the State. To address the long travel distances for members in more remote areas – such as McCook in the western region – youth have participated virtually. This approach illustrates how virtual options can expand access and inclusion for young people living in rural communities.

#### **MISSOURI: Chafee Provider Weekend Support**

Missouri's Chafee providers transport youth to weekend State YAB meetings and stay with them throughout the weekend at the hotel, providing both transportation and supervision. This comprehensive approach ensures youth can participate safely.

#### **CONNECTICUT: Social Worker Coordination**

Connecticut youth social workers arrange transportation for YAB members using Ubers, foster parents, case aides, or other available resources. This distributed approach uses existing relationships and resources rather than creating a separate transportation system.

### **OHIO: Community-Supported Transportation with Safety Standards**

Ohio often relies on trusted adult supporters—frequently Independent Living workers—to transport youth to leadership opportunities. The program also engages community volunteers who have completed required background checks. This approach draws on community support while maintaining clear safety standards for youth travel. State funding can also be used to cover the cost of transportation.

### **HAWAII: Inter-Island Air Travel**

Hawai'i holds an annual 3-day weekend summit/retreat on Oahu, and they fly board members from other islands to attend. At this event, they conduct planning for the upcoming year and provide professional development workshops. This investment in bringing board members together face-to-face from across the islands demonstrates commitment to statewide engagement despite geographic challenges.

### **CALIFORNIA: Exploring Multiple Solutions**

California supports transportation needs through multiple approaches. They use Hop Skip Drive, a specialized transportation service, and have a \$5,000 transportation impact grant for their group. They are working with a consultant to establish relationships with airlines to provide transportation for youth to statewide meetings. They've also worked with California transportation grants to pay for bus passes for youth. Despite these efforts, they acknowledge there is much more to be done to fully solve transportation challenges given the State's size.

# Conclusion and Key Takeaways

The examples presented in this guide demonstrate that there is no single correct way to structure a YAB. States have successfully implemented diverse models based on their unique contexts, including geography, funding, youth population, and organizational capacity. The common themes across the YABs we examined include:

- » Youth leadership and voice are central to all activities.
- » Compensation acknowledges youth expertise and time.
- » Dedicated adult support is essential for sustainability.
- » Youth-adult partnerships drive effectiveness.
- » Flexibility and youth input shape structure and activities.
- » Transportation support removes participation barriers.
- » YABs create meaningful opportunities for system improvement.

States also offered practical guidance for jurisdictions launching or strengthening YABs, including the following:

- » Start small and build intentionally as the program grows.
- » Ensure a dedicated organization or partner is responsible for managing the YAB.
- » Keep the work truly youth-led, from setting priorities to evaluating progress.
- » Invite youth to name the group and design its identity, including the logo.
- » Regularly ask young people what is working and what needs to change.
- » Build peer support and leadership among members.
- » Secure buy-in from agency leadership and community partners.
- » Make clear that participation is not a reward or punishment for other behaviors.
- » Once the foundation is strong, gradually expand into policy review, training roles, and legislative advocacy.

By adapting these lessons to local conditions, jurisdictions can build YABs that elevate youth voice and drive meaningful system change.

# State Contacts

We wish to thank the individuals who graciously gave their time in interviews to share details of their state's YAB operations and then reviewed and edited this summary for accuracy. For more information about the programs described here, please reach out to the following contacts.

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