

Best Practice

Kindersley Youth Council

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THE PRACTICE

In October of 2009, the Town of Kindersley established the Kindersley Youth Council. This was intended as a means to expose youth to municipal governance, encourage leadership, and to promote increased community participation and volunteerism. This initiative is unique because it allows youth to be treated as elected officials and affords them the opportunity to make decisions with the direction and assistance of the Town staff.

THE PROCESS

Prior to the establishment of the Youth Council, consultations were held with the high school principal and several key educators of the Kindersley Composite School who determined that an application process would be more profitable than an election. They also suggested the existing Student Leadership Council would be the best target audience because its current members were the most vocal leaders within the school and this would enable the Youth Council to have a better chance of success in the first few years. Nomination forms were created, and were similar to those that a Town Council candidate would complete. Additional questions were included on the form relating to what the applicants' primary reasons were for applying to be on Youth Council and what they hoped to contribute if successful in their application. A call for applications generated interest from 16 youth enrolled in Grades 8 through 10 at the Kindersley Composite School. Seven of these youth were chosen as members of the first Kindersley Youth Council. An additional applicant was invited to join as secretary to Council.

Due to the strong response, all applicants, including those not selected for Youth Council, were invited to participate on one or more of three Youth Council committees – Youth Programs, Community Life, and Youth Centennial Committee. These committees concentrated efforts on planning youth activities for Kindersley's 2010 Centennial Celebrations. These committees gave further opportunity for youth to provide input and to become involved, while distinguishing the Youth Council members as the appointed spokespeople and leaders of the overall group. Members of Youth Council each hold their positions for a one-year term after which time applications are received for the next year's Youth Council. The group meets twice monthly for meetings in Council Chambers, and each of the councilors attends additional meetings as members of the subsequent committees that were formed. Invitations have also been accepted to sit on other community committees, such as the Kindersley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Awareness Network and Multi-Use Facility Building Committee. Members report back to the Youth Council on the activities of these groups. Youth Council meetings follow "Robert's Rules of Order" and model Kindersley Town Council's "Carver" governance, so that members of council are familiar with the various activities within the Town of Kindersley. These activities include committee projects such as those carried out by Communities in Bloom, the Regional Airport Board, and a variety of others. The Youth Council has since developed its own strategic priorities which include promoting and donating funds to various projects and encouraging youth involvement.

THE RESULTS

The Kindersley Youth Council has been a great success, exceeding the expectations of both the Town of Kindersley and the community. The youth are also extremely enthusiastic about their involvement. The interest of the older members to continue being involved prompted a revision of the Terms of Reference so that up to three "senior administrative manager" positions were created for students in Grades 10 or 11 who have completed a minimum of one previous year on Youth Council. This gives younger members the ability to join while creating an opportunity for older members to continue service in an advisory capacity.

Time management and communication were major factors in the successful implementation of the Youth Council. The use of social media (i.e. Facebook), email and texting has been crucial since these are the current ways in which youth receive and distribute information. Through these methods, youths have been easily accessible and diligent in meeting their responsibilities. Youth Council meetings are conducted during school lunch hours to guarantee full attendance and to avoid conflicts with extra-curricular and academic activities. Having a designated Culture and Youth Coordinator also ensures that the Youth Council has both a mentor and a liaison with the Town working on their behalf. Through their council and committee meetings, the youth have learned time management, how to conduct meetings using "Robert's Rules of Order", governance, municipal decision making, leadership and the value of strategic planning.

The Kindersley Youth Council in 2010 was responsible for a number of fundraising initiatives which helped to raise more than \$4,000 for community projects. Contributions included more than \$2,000 toward the Multi-Use Facility, \$825 for the humanitarian group Free the Children's Vow of Silence campaign and \$1,000 toward the creation of an outdoor mural painted on the side of a local business. The Youth Centennial Committee also played the primary role in organizing an outdoor fundraising concert during Kindersley's Centennial Celebrations.

One of the greatest successes of the Kindersley Youth Council relates to Heritage Conservation. In July 2010, the 16-member Youth Centennial Committee collaborated with local historian Eleanor Smith to produce Kindersley's first-ever Heritage Walking Tours along Main Street. On July 21-22, the youth dressed in 1910-20's period costume and performed six 80-minute guided tours of downtown Kindersley, describing the development of the town from its early beginnings as Tent Town in 1909 to the present. To complement this tour, guided walking tour books which included detailed information were published and sold, and historical plaques were installed in front of 12 downtown buildings constructed between 1909 and 1914. The tours attracted a total of 250 people and were offered free of charge during Kindersley's official Centennial Celebrations. They were such a resounding success that the Youth Council agreed to perform the tours twice more during Kindersley's annual Goose Festival, which takes place on September 23-26. In recognition of Eleanor Smith who researched the information in the Heritage Walking Tour, the Kindersley Youth Council established a community grant of \$750 that will be awarded to an individual or organization seeking funds for a project that will promote or enhance the preservation of Kindersley's history and/or cultural heritage. Youth Council members have also participated in four local parades, conducted three community clean-ups, participated in radio and newspaper interviews, and have been the most prominent youth for many local groups seeking youth involvement.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are a number of factors which contributed to the success of the Youth Council. First, it is important to have a dedicated mentor/advisor in place, who understands and enjoys working with young people. Council and administration should also provide as much information as possible in terms of their expectations of the group and how the Youth Council is intended to contribute to the overall efficiency and operation of the municipality. Encouraging decision-making and providing the Youth Council with the resources and information they need to make decisions is also important. Providing a budget (grant from Town Council) for the Youth Council to spend and manage with guidance from their appointed administrator is also integral. Guidance, encouragement, accountability, acknowledgement and compassion are also key aspects that are important to the success of any Youth Council.