

Concilium

Civic/ Cultural Issues

Senior Team Project

Part 1: Project Overview

A. Area of Concern

Participating within our public school system and community, we noticed a distinct lack of a platform for youth ideas to be implemented. Often, issues directly concerning youth or in which a younger perspective would have been beneficial were given to adults to solve. This served to isolate youth from the direct changes within the Columbia community and send a message that their knowledge and input was not valuable because of their age, despite the fact youth comprise 18.8% (United States Census Bureau) of the total population. The disconnect between youth and adults may detrimentally delay the progression of the City of Columbia, as youth ideas are often not considered and future leaders could feel disenfranchised, and as a result may be dissuaded from political participation altogether. A Columbia Youth Advisory Council will allow students to voice concerns and discuss potential solutions directly with the City of Columbia. In partnership with the Youth Community Coalition, City Council, and Columbia Public Schools, this diverse group of student leaders will establish an official council made up of area youth to produce sustainable change that will create the standard for which youth ideas and ingenuity are recognized and employed.

1. Overview/Introduction

The youth of Columbia, MO will organize and implement a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in cooperation with city officials, local business, nonprofits, and other sources of assistance. The YAC will advise City Council and therefore the citizens of Columbia on citywide issues. The YAC will be comprised of a diverse fleet of youth that represent adolescents of different races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations, classes, and cultural or religious backgrounds. They will provide unique guidance on proposed and pending legislation, while also addressing challenges, exploring solutions, and drafting and proposing legislation. In addition to leadership development, active youth participants will become great vehicles of change who amass knowledge of pertinent issues and the policies needed to solve them. This in turn will inspire the next generation of civic leaders who will lead us into the future. The singularity of the Columbia YAC in regards to those of different cities will lay within the substantial amount of authoritative power used to create effective change. The YAC hopes to share the process used to establish their commission and will expand beyond the borders of Columbia to engage other cities, sparking a rippling effect that will fruitfully encompass the entire nation.

B. Challenges Identified

Youth in the United States often have their political input discriminated against due to their age and perceived inexperience. This discrimination may discourage youth who may then turned off of the political process which, in turn may endanger the future political structure of the United States.

Considering the fact that there are limited opportunities for youth to participate in local and national politics, there may be a problem with the growing youth population being under represented in the decision making process, because adult leaders may discount youth ideas and opinions.

Because some adults are not comfortable with the notion of empowered youth making decisions that affect adult lives, the council may not be backed as well as it could be by the average adult population. This may lead to a lack of support that could jeopardize the success of YAC efforts.

Because founding members of the Youth Advisory Council will ultimately move on to other things, there may be difficulty in sustaining the council after the original committee creators have left. This may lead to the dissolution of the new YAC which would once again leave young people without a voice in civic government.

Established political processes are often cumbersome and set in tradition. This may hinder the youth council from implementing solutions, causing the council to become bogged down in political quagmire, which may block implementation of its solutions into the community of Columbia.

Due to the fact that the youth of Columbia will address difficult social issues (ex. homelessness, suicide, etc.), the council may face willful ignorance by some of the community who would rather not acknowledge harder topics. This may impede successful implementation of the council's solutions.

C. Underlying Problem

Since the collective intelligence of our youth is often discounted by adult leaders in our communities, how might we increase youth involvement in government through development of a sustainable Youth Advisory Council in Columbia, Missouri, so that young citizens may collaborate with civic leaders to develop and implement practical solutions for modern day issues in the year 2015?

D. Alternative Solution Ideas

Students of Columbia Public Schools will create a website and blog where youth in the community can put their ideas in a forum where the city officials will gain exposure to these usually unheard opinions. This will provide a myriad of suggestions for city officials to consider.

High school civics teachers will host mini city council meetings at each of the high schools in Columbia and leaders of each core group will report to their designated representative on the city council. This will provide a diverse perspective on youth opinion.

The City of Columbia will work in cooperation with Columbia Public Schools, as well as private schools, to offer an incentive program called the PIRK Program (Providing Incentives for Recognizing Kids). PIRK will offer events, recognition, scholarships, food, internship opportunities through high school classes, and dual credit opportunities. The PIRK program will facilitate a stream of youth ideas and opinions that can be mined by city officials to create powerful solutions year after year.

A separate subcommittee of the youth, deemed the Publicity and Politics Committee, will be created to deal specifically with both public relations and political issues. It will be comprised of members most interested in debate and political science, who will research and determine non-traditional strategies of representation. The subcommittee will also befriend and work in partnership with specific correspondents of each local news outlet. This will assure that the PPC will be able to continuously problem solve issues within the City of Columbia without becoming caught in aimless political webs.

The Unity Brigade, will be created in order to promote awareness and acceptance of difficult issues. Members will investigate opportunities to speak at different Columbia events which either fully or partly pertain to the issue at hand. In the case that an event does not exist, one of the allotted public addresses (not including the first one) shall be used to inform the public. In addition, members of the Unity Brigade will also contact local news outlets in conjunction with the Publicity and Politics Committee in order to advance tolerance. This will allow the Unity Brigade to problem solve modern day issues that the majority of Columbia either would or would not currently be discussing.

Students from Columbia Public Schools will create a Youth Public Relations group for the city. The group will operate both inside and outside of school whenever necessary. These duties include, but are not limited to: publicity, open door sessions, exposure to the process, website with RSS Feeds to disseminate information, utilization of social media to communicate ideas, serve as press liaisons, etc. This group, will generate community support, enhance sustainability and work to implement powerful solutions to benefit the City of Columbia.

D. Plan of Action

In searching for challenges that face our communities, we discovered that our youth have often been excluded from the civil government decision-making process. In order to carry out our solution, we needed a dedicated group of young people to define and carry out the agenda. In order to do so, we formed a group of FPS students we call the Concilium (Latin for council). The team determined it would be best to establish a small group of dedicated problem solvers to provide the planning, networking, and scaffolding necessary to develop a sustainable Youth Advisory Council (YAC). During the first phase of our problem solving we focused solely on reaching out to the youth community and searching for those that are passionate and interested in making positive impacts on the community. We wished to achieve a diversity of demographic backgrounds from our youth members, so that the decisions being made will be accepted and beneficial to everyone despite their backgrounds. We also wanted to document this process, so that other cities could replicate it.

The Concilium needed to not only organize and carry out the campaign to establish a Youth Advisory Council, but also to identify young people willing to serve. Once identified, the Concilium recognized it would be necessary to bring out the leadership qualities in each of our candidates through training sessions that focused on development of twenty first century skills such as collaboration, communication and creative problem solving, which are the skills critical for effective decision-making. We also needed to involve the major stakeholders who directly contribute to our community. The Youth Advisory council collaborated with the Columbia Youth Community Coalition, the Columbia City Council, and Columbia Public Schools to host an annual Youth Summit to help establish a team of qualified young individuals. These individuals were then encouraged to submit a formal application to the city, and through a deliberate selection process, in accordance with the ordinances and procedures of the City of Columbia 21 youth were selected to serve on the 2015 Youth Advisory Council.

The Concilium worked directly with the three primary leadership organizations to develop and implement a sustainable action plan to ensure the council survived beyond the first year. All three organizations agreed to an annual timeline of events that organizes and hosts monthly meetings to discuss issues occurring within the community that directly or indirectly impact youth, develop potential solutions to those issues, and lead to implementation of key solutions. YAC will present their ideas and opinions as actionable scenarios to inform civic leaders, take action on one or more topics annually through community service and outreach, and will share experiences with other youth groups outside of our city's borders, to inspire more young individuals to become involved in their communities. YAC will increase civic involvement amongst the youth of Columbia, and will facilitate collaboration between community leaders that will ensure the voice of young people has a direct impact on the solutions and decisions implemented in our community.

Part 2: Implementation of the Plan

A. Actions and Outcomes to Date

- June 2014 Sent out Action Plan and started recruiting members for The Concilium, asked Government & Civic teachers to nominate students for selection.
- July 2014 Planned Youth Summit, contacted local school districts (outside of CPS as well), created equity team dedicated to preserving diversity, contacted and secured keynote speakers, contacted non-governmental organizations, contacted faith-based organizations, secured Youth Summit location, publicized Youth Summit, determined selection process and criteria.
- August 2014 Investigated different leadership opportunities for non-chosen YAC youth, selected 100 students for Youth Summit through process that ensured diversity, notified nominated students, received students confirmation of attendance and alerted applicants who were not selected about a potential ability to apply in case of vacancy.

- September 2014 Notified and invited press, interviewed with local news publications, secured resources (ex. food, supplies) needed for Youth Summit, sent reminders to Final 100, created official YAC website (with subpage for Youth Summit), chose leadership training key speakers, chose selection process leaders.
- October 2014 Youth Summit, press release, chose leadership training key speakers/leaders, chose selection process leaders, contacted and secured leadership training key speakers/leaders, contacted and secured selection process leaders, planned structure of events for leadership training, created official YAC application.
- November 2014 Open submissions for YAC began and were accepted by December 31st, put application on YAC website, secured location of first official YAC session.
- December 2014 Concilium selection process occurred for recommendation to city council, private and public announcements were disseminated, developed and secured leadership training resources (ex. food, supplies), Proposed ordinance to Columbia City Council.
- January 2015 City Council finalized selection of YAC Representatives. Leadership training occurred, wrote YAC member handbook, secured resources (ex. food, supplies) for first YAC session, sent the YAC reminders of first session, decided City Council rotation that will facilitate YAC meetings
- February 2015 Issued handbooks, inner YAC leadership and subcommittee elections process prepared, YAC first annual public address, notified and invited press to first meeting in March
- March 2015 First YAC official meeting occurs at city hall, wrote the official Self-Sustainability Action Plan, first project implementation, found sponsors in all three high schools and a district liaison to facilitate elections and ensure sustainability.
- April 2015 Second YAC meeting will be held, consideration of first community project will take place, finalize sponsors in all three high schools and a district liaison to ensure sustainability.

B. Organization

The work to institute the Youth Advisory council in Columbia (YAC) was done in large part by students of three high schools, and was aided by Youth Community Coalition and the city council of Columbia. The team utilized the Freedcamp Project Management Software to facilitate collaboration and implement the timeline. The student team to create Columbia's YAC was split up based on general focus of the students in three main groups. While people worked on a specific group goal they also worked outside of their defined roles as the need arose. The general roles for the students were defined as an administrative group, a public relations group, and a logistics group. The administrative group worked to help organize meeting times, and the PR group focused mostly on recruitment, while the logistic group worked to help with the more technical issues associated with implementing the council. The individual tasks of each member showing their general area of expertise and participation are listed below.

Administrative Group: Gabriel Calvin, Grace Hodson, Dzung Nguyen, Sloane Scott
 Public Relations Group: Claire Bilyeu, Julia Hill, Brady Hughes, Stephanie Kang
 Logistics Group: Landon Bilyeu, Nick Edgar, Anna Miller, Madi Null

C. Resource Identification and Utilization

Columbia City Council- A governmental agency elected by the citizens of Columbia, Missouri. City Hall provided the funding and approval that made the Youth Advisory Council possible.

Youth Community Coalition- The mission of YC2 is to help youth develop into productive and self-sufficient citizens by working together to decrease substance abuse and promote healthy behaviors. Funded the project for the Youth Summit & promotion of the event which was a meeting with YAC candidates at the ARC where discussions and activities were held.

Columbia Public Schools- Public School District in Columbia, Missouri. Provided support for the sustainability model proposed by Concilium that utilized district Social Studies and English Language Arts coordinators.

National League of Cities- An organization dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents. Sloane attended the Annual Conference of the National League of Cities in November in Austin, Texas. City Council funded her trip with \$500. She met other youth delegates across the United States.

Part 3: Project Outcomes

A. Accomplishments

In early May of 2012, the first draft of what the YAC might look like nationwide was created by Sloane Scott. The idea of a youth council began to formulate. Sloane began to explore the idea of a nationwide youth council when, in her accelerated learning program, she settled on the idea of a local youth council for Columbia, Missouri.

The idea of a city council sat for 2 whole years before the project began to take shape. In 2014, Columbia's Future Problem Solvers (FPS) adopted her idea as to be their FPS project for the 2014-2015 school year. Right from the start the city government was involved. In February and March of 2014, two exploratory meetings were held at city hall. City council members, school counselors, members of the Youth Community Coalition, members of the Board of Education, and of course, Columbia FPS members were in attendance. These meetings presented to the city what a youth council might look like and proposed how it could benefit the city.

In April of 2014, Columbia FPS hosted a "Deep Dive" at Battle High School in order to further develop our city's image of what a youth council might look like. This creative problem solving extravaganza consisted of over 50 students from all three comprehensive high schools in our district. These students partook in problem solving and leadership activities that demonstrated the ability of our young people to address major issues. City Manager Mike Matthes attended this event in order to observe the process of how a youth council may operate, and was witness to the benefit of free-thinking youth on a government advisory council.

The concept of the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was finalized in August of 2014. The Official YAC Action Plan was finished. This allowed for serious steps to be taken towards realizing the project's goal. Along with the finalization of the YAC came an article from Columbia Tribune, a popular newspaper in Columbia. This article focused on the development of the YAC project and served to inform Columbia's youth of how YAC would allow a forum for their voices to be heard in city government.

Later that month, Columbia FPS Concilium members met to discuss the next step in starting a Youth Advisory Council in Columbia. The Concilium was the name given to those who would organize and implement the action plan for YAC. Plans for the "Youth Summit" were started in August. This summit would bring together all high school students in Columbia who were interested in being involved in youth government. This gathering of students was designed to demonstrate how the council would work, and the FPS Concilium would begin observing the first potential YAC members in action. The Concilium set the date for the Youth Summit to October 4th, 2014. They worked with the Youth Community Coalition to organize the event and reserve the ARC, Columbia's recreational center.

The Concilium, started September with a bang. We met on September 3rd to finalize our timeline and action plan. On September 16th members met with leaders of YC2, at their headquarters, to plan the Youth Summit event schedule. On September 25th, the Concilium met at Battle High School in order to create the media campaign for the Youth Summit. Our media team then launched the campaign in all three comprehensive high schools.

In October, our plans started to come together. On October 1st, the Columbia tribune wrote another article documenting the progress of YAC and promoting the upcoming Youth Summit. On October 4th the Concilium hosted YAC's very first Youth Summit. Over 40 high school students showed up to this event. Several city council members, reporters for the Columbia Tribune, and YC2 members also attended. Columbia Access Television (CAT-TV) provided equipment to film and document the entire event. The next day a third article was published by the Missourian, another popular Columbia newspaper, about the success of the Youth Summit and the goals of the Youth Council. On October 17th, we met to discuss our next steps and began writing the policy and procedures manual.

Concilium members also met on November 12th to discuss and review which of the Youth Summit attendee's would best serve Columbia's very first Youth Advisory Council. Columbia's FPS uses state of the art project management software to organize and implement tasks, but we also meet as often as possible to discuss the project. On November 20th, Sloane Scott was approved by the city council to attend the National League of Cities Conference in Austin, Texas. This Conference allowed Sloane to make connections and network with other cities' youth councils. She acquired contacts and useful information that she brought back to Columbia to utilize in our local YAC project.

The Concilium finished 2014 by completing the YAC member selection process by early December. They narrowed the 50 applicants down to 30 youth council members and recommended those members to city officials. The city reviewed our choices and began advertising the formal applications for city committees.

The Concilium started off 2015 by visiting City Hall on January 5th to be present for the official proposal of an ordinance sponsored by council members Barbara Hoppe and Ian Thomas for creation of a city Youth Advisory Council. At this meeting, members of the Concilium gave a brief introduction of YAC and demonstrated the benefits such a program could bring the city of Columbia. City council voted unanimously to adopt the ordinance and the Youth Advisory Council became an official city commission. At this point the project caught the attention of Columbia Public Schools superintendent, Dr. Peter Stiepleman. In early January he visited Battle High School to learn about YAC and how Columbia Public Schools could collaborate with the commission. It was determined that CPS would do everything they could to both support the commission, and draw from their thoughts and ideas. On January 20th the Concilium met once more with a leader of YC2 about what would come next for Columbia's YAC and began outlining.

During the month of February the group outlined the agenda for the first Youth Advisory Council meeting and publicly advertised on the city website. Activities that introduced members to each other and highlighted creative problem solving skills were planned for the first meeting.