SETTING UP A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (MIS): FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Building an afterschool Management Information System (MIS) is no simple matter. The National League of Cities has identified the following practical considerations for cities weighing whether and how to proceed:[1]

PURPOSE: "The first rule of management information systems," the National League of Cities says, "is not to begin any discussion by talking about management information systems." Rather than starting with the technology, system-builders should convene community leaders with a stake in afterschool, settle on a common set of goals and then figure out what information would help accomplish those goals.

TIME: Setting up an MIS takes time. How much depends on variables such as whether your city sources its MIS from an outside vendor or chooses to develop its own unique system. When coming up with a timeline, make sure to factor in the need to consult with the city agencies, schools, providers and other parties that will be using the system.

COST: Cost is often a factor for cities that decide to develop their own MIS rather than buy a commercial system. Either way, it's important to keep in mind that your system will require adjustments to accommodate new needs and partners. Cities that dedicate funding specifically to MIS maintenance are able to plan ahead for system growth and adapt to changing conditions as needed.

EXISTING DATA USE: Most providers already generate and use data in one way or another. System-builders must determine how a new MIS will support, replace or change the practices already in place and answer the "what's in it for me?" question.

PILOT-TESTING: To troubleshoot the inevitable glitches, build trust and win supporters, cities often opt to pilot their MIS with a limited number of their most enthusiastic providers. This will extend the timeline for getting your MIS up and running systemwide.

DATA-SHARING AGREEMENTS: For most cities, establishing an information-sharing relationship with the public schools, as required by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, is the most difficult obstacle to overcome. Be prepared for this to take more than a year of ongoing negotiation.

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1 Chris Kingsley, *Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities*, National League of Cities, 2012, 15-39.

parents saw a safety issue in sending their children to programs in facilities where older youth would also be present. In Chicago, young people pointed to the fact that they couldn't use their bus passes after 6 p.m. as an obstacle to taking part in afterschool.[13]

New York City recognized that the name of its afterschool initiative, Out of School Time, had become a generic term and didn't mean much to young people. Working with a market research and branding firm, the city renamed the initiative the Comprehensive After School System of NYC, or COMPASS, and gave its programs for middle school students a catchy moniker of their own: School's Out NYC (SONYC, pronounced "sonic"). The name, one of nearly 400 submitted by

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13 Pat Wechsler, "By the Numbers: Using Data to See the Successes and Shortcomings of Afterschool Programs," *Afterschool Today*, Fall 2012, 8.

Youth councils are a popular and effective way to get youth more involved in solving local problems and more actively engaged in the community. Many cities already use youth councils to inject fresh ideas and youth perspectives into local decision-making. Youth councils can also promote community service and foster a better understanding among young people of how municipal government works.

Establishing a local youth council is a substantial but rewarding undertaking. The following suggestions, drawn from the experience of cities and towns throughout the nation, provide guidance on how to get started.

Begin by assessing young people's interests.

To ensure genuine youth involvement from the outset, an essential first step is to find a few key young people in the community who can collaborate with a designated staff person on early planning, organizing, and recruitment for the new youth council. Youth summits and focus groups can provide additional ways to bring youth interests and perspectives into the initial planning efforts. The specific method used for soliciting young people's views is less important than finding some way to give youth in the community a chance to say what's important to them.

Define the youth council's roles and responsibilities.

In partnership with youth, the city needs to develop a framework — whether a working charter, constitution, or some other document – that outlines the duties and limitations of the council and its members. While some youth councils have a direct role in the enactment of city ordinances or the allocation of city funds for youth programs, others serve an advisory role and work with city agencies on positive solutions to community problems. Every youth council can play a key role in organizing young people to take a more active role in their community.

The Mayor's Youth Council in Boston has a total of 36 members, including two high school juniors or seniors from each neighborhood of the city. The Youth Council meets regularly with Mayor Thomas Menino and plays a key role in planning and implementing an annual Mayor's Youth Summit, a Fall Youth Forum, a comprehensive youth survey, and youth mapping activities that generate data for a community YOUTHLINE. The YOUTHLINE helps connect Boston's young people to available resources in the city online and via a peer listening line. An active leadership program also gives Youth Council members opportunities to participate in training sessions that strengthen team-building, public speaking, and other skills.

Reach out to diverse groups of young people.

One of the great benefits of establishing a youth council is that it provides a vehicle for engaging young people who otherwise wouldn't be involved in local government. While it is often easy to use student councils or similar groups as sources of referrals or nominations for council membership, cities miss some great opportunities to reflect the full diversity of their communities and bring new voices to the discussion if they rely too heavily upon such "shortcuts" in the recruitment process. Personal recruitment among youth not traditionally "asked to the table" can be very powerful and yield long-term benefits. Efforts to include youth from other cultures, ethnic groups, and language minorities are also extremely important.

Look beyond your city for collaboration and support.

By encouraging neighboring communities to start their own youth councils, cities can easily exchange ideas and keep their momentum going. City officials and youth leaders can also reach beyond their own region, contacting youth councils in other states or parts of the country for advice on specific issues and challenges. Finally, a range of national organizations (including those listed on the insert at the back of this kit) offer training and technical assistance of various sorts that may prove helpful to municipal leaders and youth as they work together to build a strong youth council.

Put resources behind your efforts.

Youth councils typically don't cost a lot of money. At the same time, young people know that cities invest in the initiatives they care about. Even a modest budget for youth council funding and staff support will send a powerful signal that the city is serious about youth participation and committed to doing what is necessary for the youth council to succeed.

Other options to consider:

The appointment of young people to city boards or commissions (in addition to or in lieu of a youth council) provides another way to bring youth voices into municipal government. By adding youth to key decision-making bodies, cities can empower young people and give them a direct role in establishing local policies or setting city priorities. Some communities have also found that the confidence and participation of youth members rise when they are not alone, but rather serve alongside at least one other young person with whom they can share insights and provide mutual support.

Boulder, Colorado: Youth Opportunities Program (Pop. 83,312)

The Youth Opportunities Program builds community capacity to meet youth needs by involving youth in decision-making, providing financial resources, improving youth access to activities, and encouraging youth involvement in community service. The Program provides grants that benefit youth and include the youth voice in their decision-making process. Grants typically require that the recipient engage in some form of community service. One primary vehicle for the Program's work is the Youth Opportunities Advisory Board. The Board selects its fourteen members to achieve diverse representation (e.g., race, age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, interests) rather than purely by school success or geography. Board members make funding decisions and provide assistance to grantees. The Program is funded through a percentage of a local sales tax.

Boise, Idaho: Youth on City Commissions (Pop. 125,738)

Two years ago, Boise passed an ordinance to allow youth to serve one-year terms as voting members on nine boards and commissions and non-voting members on two other boards. Youth appointees attend training on "How to Be a Successful Board Member," and all adults attended a Youth Sensitivity workshop. The experience allows municipal decisions to incorporate the youth voice while providing insight into municipal issues.

Columbus (Bartholomew County), Indiana: YouthMapping (Pop. 71,435)

Under the direction of the Bartholomew County Youth Advocacy Commission, YouthMappers collected baseline information on the youth-serving agencies in their rural town to justify the need for more quality youth services. The process of YouthMapping mobilized the local government. At a town meeting held the month before a local election, the YouthMappers presented their findings and offered recommendations including the idea of the media showcasing positive issues about youth. As a result, the local newspaper began a regular section to address youth contributions to the community. Moreover, after the town meeting, the Mayor instituted an 80-member Youth Council to address youth issues in Columbus.

Indianapolis, Indiana: Mayor's Youth Council (Pop. 741,952)

The Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) focuses on programs and policies of interest to local youth. It has 25 members nominated either by a school superintendent, principal, teacher, guidance counselor, community leader, or leader of a faith-based institution. Several of the MYC members will also be appointed to various city boards and commissions this year. Its Teen Summit provided workshops on "Laws that Affect Teens" and "Dealing with Stress, Stereotypes, Depression, and Peer Pressure." Among other programs, the MYC has a youth town hall meeting where three students from each of the city's high schools have direct interaction with the Mayor. Using a grant from Youth as Resources, the MYC sponsors service programs such as "Operation Inspiration Carriers" where homeless children receive free backpacks filled with education supplies and hygiene items.

Baltimore, Maryland: YouthMapping (Pop. 651,154)

The primary goal in organizing a Community YouthMapping effort was to mobilize communities across Baltimore. It was conducted in the city's nine Police Districts over a six-month period. Each district identified a local community-based organization to take the lead on managing the day-to-day operation of the project. Using approximately 20 young people per district, it took 2 1/2 weeks to map the entire city. At the end of the mapping process, young people shared the information they collected with the community by conducting "street corner Speakouts" and by participating in Baltimore's Promise Summit, a citywide meeting of 7,000 people where each citizen was able to vote on five priority goals for youth in Baltimore.

Plymouth, Minnesota: Plymouth Youth Advisory Council (Pop. 65,896)

The Plymouth Youth Advisory Council (YAC) presents a consistent voice for the youth population in the city. It mirrors the city council using ward-style representation. It has advised the city government on issues such as a youth curfew, the construction of a youth center, jobs, transportation, and city planning. Its annual Youth Forum includes over eighty youth, the mayor, city council members, and the public. It consists of small group discussions led by youth council members, a larger meeting where teens voice their opinions, and a question and answer session with city officials.

Natchez, Mississippi: Mayor's Youth Council (Pop. 19,460)

The Natchez Youth Council is composed of students from the city's four high schools who are selected by their teachers. The Council's goal is to produce a learning experience on how city government works. After studying municipal issues in 1999, the Youth Council implemented "One Natchez – A Rally Against Racism" for Make a Difference day. The day began with a service project involving youth and adults and concluded with a meeting involving the entire Natchez community where the city council made a commitment to eradicate racism in the town and encourage service projects toward that end.

Farmington Hills, Michigan: Youth Commission (Pop. 74,652)

The Farmington Hills Youth Council originated from a roundtable discussion that the mayor had with a group of teenagers and has now progressed to become an official city commission. The mayor assigns at least one youth to various commissions, including Voter Participation, Cable Access Committee, Historic District Commission, Zoning Board, and Planning Board. The Youth Council makes recommendations to the city on the needs and concerns of youth and the community and the appropriate means by which public and private agencies, in cooperation with volunteer efforts, may address such needs and concerns. The Farmington Hills Youth Council also invites other cities to attend its meetings and assists them in the creation of their own youth Council. A training event was held for nearby cities, and a video of it is available for purchase by contacting 248/473-9500.

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Mayor's Youth Council (Pop. 190,395)

The Mayor's Youth Council partners with public and private organizations to get youth input on policy and youth concerns. Each year, it gets involved in a different project. This year the council plans to go into high schools with the City Commissioners and do a jam session with questions and answers. This past year, council members organized six Youth Town Hall Meetings that helped youth identify issues in their City and develop solutions for policy-makers. The Council devoted the first three to brainstorming of issues and the final three to problem solving on these issues. The council holds an annual event – KidSpeak – where youth in the community have the opportunity to speak before an audience that includes legislators, candidates, state and local administrators, educators, and industry leaders.

Hampton, Virginia: Youth Commission (Pop. 133,793)

The Hampton Youth Commission is a diverse group of high-school aged young people who represent Hampton youth. The Youth Commission champions the youth component of the city's Comprehensive Plan and appropriates funds to youth initiatives through its grant program. Two youth work as city planners, and the Youth Commission places youth members on other boards and commissions. Two tools are available from the Commission. One is "Shaping the Future: The Hampton Youth Commission," a video showcasing youth civic engagement. The other is "Working Together, Changing Communities," a 55-page manual describing the four stages to developing a successful youth commission. The set is $50; contact 727/728-3285 or youthcom@hampton.gov.

Vancouver, Washington: Grants Assisting Teen Endeavors (GATE) (Pop. 46,380)

Originally run by a board of adults with teen input, the GATE program is now solely run by an advisory board composed entirely of youth. The countywide GATE program (formerly known as Tapping the Talents of Teens sponsored by the city of Vancouver before going county-wide) provides grants for youth who are interested in doing community service. Each year, the GATE program chooses one asset for youth on which to focus the bulk of its giving. This past year the Board focused on providing "a more caring school climate" and gave grants of $500. GATE also produces the annual Youth Achievement Awards to honor youth for efforts to build community and engage in service.

Wausau, Wisconsin: Mayor's Youth Action Council (Pop. 38,426)

The Mayor's Youth Action Council began in 1999. Youth members have served on city committees to address HUD funding and the uses of city parks. The Council held a youth forum to involve more youth in the issue process, and next year will inaugurate a series of youth forums at each of the high schools in order to achieve accessibility and awareness for all students. The Council also sponsored an anti-racism poster contest to raise awareness for diversity issues among the public and created a Youth Grant Program to allocate funding towards youth projects and events.

Casper, Wyoming: Youth Empowerment Council (Pop. 49,192)

The Casper Youth Empowerment Council (YEC) plays an advisory role to the school district, the city council, and the local hospital foundation. Next year, the YEC plans to focus its attention on the dropout rate by encouraging the development of small mentoring groups in secondary schools and giving teens greater access to adult advocates and community resources. YEC has sponsored concerts to raise suicide awareness and to promote volunteerism. The council also provides grants to youth and youth groups for community services and leadership training. Last year, the YEC organized a youth recognition program called Trailblazers, in partnership with the Rails to Trails project. The Council also sponsors focus groups, which give youth the opportunity to be in leadership roles and at the same time allow other youth to see teenagers just like themselves in such roles.

Note: Examples from Boston, MA, Tempe, AZ, and the Nevada League of Cities and Municipalities are described elsewhere in this kit.

Academy for Educational Development:
Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (the Center)

The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research has four youth development goals: 1) to make available "what works;" 2) to increase the number of people, places, and possibilities available to young people; 3) to strengthen and support local systems in order to build a comprehensive youth development infrastructure; and 4) to increase public will to support positive development for all youth. One key initiative of the Center is Community YouthMapping. Working in teams, young people canvass neighborhoods, block-by-block, identifying and documenting places to go and things to do, as well as an array of services and resources for them and their families. The Center also helps cities create YouthLink, an interactive web site that contains easily accessible youth information, and YouthStation – an interactive computer kiosk – that contains a computer, a touch screen, a keyboard, and a laser printer. The kiosks can dispense information on services for children, youth, and families as well as opportunities for employment, volunteering, education, or recreation.

Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, AED Headquarters 1825 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20009-5721 Telephone: (202) 884-8000. http://www.aed.org/us/youth.html

Arsalyn

The Arsalyn Program of Ludwick Family Foundation encourages young Americans to become informed and active participants in the electoral process with the goal of ensuring that voting becomes a lifetime commitment on the part of our nation's young adults. Arsalyn technical assistance projects aim at youth and adult representatives of organizations working on civic and political engagement among young people grades five through twelve and/or ages 11-20. The organization also provides arsalINFO, an online database of organizations promoting youth civic and political engagement.

Arsalyn Program, Ludwick Family Foundation, PO Box 1796, Glendora, CA 91740. Telephone: (626) 914 5404. http://www.arsalyn.org/

America's Promise

America's Promise encourages communities, businesses, and organizations to make commitments to fulfill one or more of the Five Promises (ongoing relationships with caring adults; safe places with structured activities; healthy start and future; marketable skills through effective education; and opportunities to give back through community service). These partners agree to expand existing youth programs or create new ones and hold themselves accountable by measuring their progress. Those who build community-wide alliances to fulfill all Five Promises are known as Communities of Promise. These communities form grassroots coalitions among the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors to generate more resources for young people who need them.

America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth, 909 N. Washington Street, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314-1556. Telephone: (703) 684-4500. http://www.americaspromise.org/

Innovation Center for Community Youth Development

The Innovation Center is a partner with the National 4-H Council and helps sponsor the Council's "At the Table" initiative that encourages youth involvement in community decision-making. The Innovation Center's network of youth and adult staff and partners seek, test, and promote innovative concepts and practices in order to provide cutting edge tools for youth workers in diverse settings. Its Building Community: A Toolkit for Youth and Adults in Charting Assets and Creating Change gives users what they need to create youth/adult partnerships, identify community assets, create community vision and action plan, and mobilize local change.

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 7100 Connecticut Ave, Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999. Telephone: (301) 961-2837. http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/

National 4-H Council

The National 4-H Council's mission is to build a world in which youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change. 4-H – one of the largest youth organizations in the U.S. with more than 6.6 million participants – is located in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Its Youth-Corporate Connections Team offers grants for youth in local communities. Its public service campaign – "Are You Into It?™" – has raised awareness about community service and increased the number of 4-H'ers who volunteer. National 4-H Council partners with the Cooperative Extension System, communities, and other organizations to provide technical support and training, develop curricula, create model programs, and promote positive youth development.

National 4-H Council, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815. Telephone: (301) 961-2800. http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/index.htm

National Network for Youth (NNY)

The National Network informs public policy, educates the public, and strengthens the field of youth work. Members operate out of agencies, community centers, classrooms, storefronts, houses, vans, and on the streets providing direct services to youth. Additionally, NNY and its members promote the positive development of youth through community service, peer education, alcohol-and drug-free teen clubs, drama groups, adventure-based programs, and youth involvement on governing boards and other decision-making bodies. NNY also serves as a powerful advocate in Washington, D.C., on key legislation and spending affecting youth. NNY produces two newsletters, a journal, fact sheets, training manuals, and other resources. The Network's annual symposium brings together youth workers, young people, decision-makers and local, state, and national leaders from across the country.

National Network for Youth, 1319 F Street, NW, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20004. Telephone: (202) 783-7949. www.nn4youth.org

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National Youth Leadership Council

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC)'s mission is to build vital, just communities with young people through service-learning. NYLC operations have forged a path for service-learning by convening the national service-learning field annually since 1989; assisting in the renewal and reform of elementary, secondary, community, and higher education; advocating for progressive youth, educational, and national service policies; developing and publishing service-learning and leadership curriculum; providing training and technical assistance for young people and adults; and providing programs and services that are multicultural in content and seeking to engage individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

National Youth Leadership Council, 1667 Snelling Avenue North, St. Paul, MN 55108. Telephone: (651) 631-3672. http://www.nylc.org/

Prudential Youth Leadership Institute (PYLI)

The Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative encourages young people to become actively involved in making their communities better places to live. The Center for Creative Leadership, one of the world's foremost authorities on leadership principles, developed the PYLI's interactive, state-of-the-art curriculum. It provides the caliber of leadership training typically available only to corporate executives and government leaders. It features a challenging series of lessons and exercises on community needs analysis, goal setting, team building, community mapping, project planning, decision-making, and other leadership dynamics. The curriculum culminates in a service project, created and implemented by the participants, and a final graduation ceremony. PYLI provides seminars throughout the country.

Prudential Youth Leadership Institute, Prudential Insurance Company of America, 751 Broad Street, Newark, NJ 07102-3777 Telephone: (202) 729-8142. http://www.pyli.org/

Youth as Resources (YAR)

The Center for Youth as Resources (CYAR) serves as the national and international umbrella organization for 73 Youth as Resources (YAR) programs located in 21 states, as well as abroad. Local YAR programs, governed by boards composed of youth and adults, provide grants for youth-initiated, youth-led community projects. Their projects tackle a range of social issues that concern youth – from health, housing, education, and the environment to drug abuse, gangs, illiteracy, and crime. Through instructional materials, technical assistance, and training conducted by experienced youth and adults, CYAR helps local YAR programs start, develop, and expand. YAR programs are parts of existing youth initiatives or community institutions, or may be separate nonprofit organizations.

Center for Youth as Resources Headquarters, 1000 Connecticut Ave, NW, 13th Floor, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: (202) 261-4131. http://www.yar.org/index.html

Youth on Board

Youth on Board's work is based on building mutually respectful relationships; ownership of communities; skills; and permanent societal change. It trains young people and adults in the hard and soft skills they need to work as peers. The philosophy is that dealing with agendas and budgets requires dealing with attitudes and relationships. Youth on Board provides consulting and training for organizations and municipalities that are interested in involving youth in decision-making. Adults and youth facilitate these training sessions. Topics include "Understanding Adultism - Looking at Barriers that Inhibit Youth Involvement" and "Recruiting Young People for Your Project."

Youth on Board, 58 Day Street, 3rd floor, P.O. Box 440322, Somerville, MA 02144. Telephone: (617) 623-9900 x1242. http://www.youthonboard.org/

Youth Service America (YSA)

Youth Service America is a resource center and premier alliance of more than 200 organizations committed to increasing the quantity and quality of opportunities for young Americans to serve locally, nationally, or globally. SERVEnet (http://www.SERVEnet.org) – YSA's comprehensive web site – matches the skills, experience, and enthusiasm of volunteers of all ages with local organizations that need their participation. In addition to posting events, job openings, news, and best practices, affiliates can find resources and best practices online to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of their programs. YSA sponsors an annual conference of service learning professionals and National Youth Service Day – both in cooperation with the National Youth Leadership Council. On Youth Service Day, which occurs annually in April, communities, schools, and local organizations organize and promote service projects.

Youth Service America, 1101 15th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: (202) 296-2992. www.ysa.org

*E*very neighborhood has a variety of resources for young people – places they can go, things they can do, people or groups that they can turn to for help. These resources are essential building blocks for any city that wants to strengthen its policies and programs for youth. Yet municipal leaders often have only a sketchy picture of what is currently available in their community, and as a result they may miss important opportunities for progress on behalf of children, youth, and families.

A number of cities have responded to this challenge by involving young people in well-organized efforts to "map" the neighborhoods in which they live. Developed by the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Community YouthMapping enables young people to canvas neighborhoods, using interviews and observations to compile detailed information on places to go, things to do, and services and resources available to them and their families. Key steps in the Community YouthMapping process include:

Establish a community advisory board.
Young people are the key stakeholders in Community YouthMapping. It is essential, however, that they have technical, political, and personal support from adults as they collect, analyze, and present the data generated through their canvassing efforts. A key element in this support is the creation of an advisory board composed of city officials, business and religious leaders, community-based agencies, and youth who can guide and promote YouthMapping activities.

Designate a lead agency.
While YouthMapping by definition is a community-wide effort, a local youth-related organization or other appropriate agency has to take a lead role in planning and implementation. This lead agency will assume day-to-day responsibility for recruiting, training, and supervising YouthMappers. It will also manage project budgets and community relations throughout the effort.

Identify funding to support core costs.
Some combination of city and private funds will be needed to pay for a project manager and/or coordinator, other staff at the lead agency, and operating costs (ranging from meeting expenses and supplies to computer software and transportation). Cities can include Community YouthMapping in their summer jobs program in order to pay participating youth. They can also work with local schools to secure academic credit or community service stipends for YouthMappers.

Develop plans for recruiting and training youth.
Recruitment efforts should be designed to reach young people from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, engaging youth in sufficient numbers so that they comprise at least 75 percent of each YouthMapping team. Careful attention to initial training will also ensure that youth are able to conduct interviews effectively and to identify and document community resources in their neighborhoods.

Work with young people to analyze results.
The data generated through YouthMapping will tell many stories, revealing which neighborhoods are "resource poor" and what resources appear to be missing, inadequately available, inaccessible, or poorly provided. Past efforts have compared data on crime, student achievement, employment, economic development, and local youth expenditures to YouthMapping information on opportunities and resources for youth in specific neighborhoods.

Use key findings to guide future action.
A well-designed process can accurately define what is working well and build consensus on community strengths and problems, including service or resource gaps that must be filled. A formal report released jointly by youth and municipal leaders offers one way to draw public attention to key findings. Results can also be shared with other communities by posting them on the national Community YouthMapping website.

Other options to consider.
Youth perspectives can be incorporated into municipal planning efforts in other ways as well. The City of Hampton, Virginia routinely hires young people as staff in its local Planning Department. These young planners work collaboratively with the department's professional planners, generating new opportunities and insights that broaden and strengthen the agency's work.

Detroit was the first community to share its collected Community YouthMapping data on "Community Kiosks" located in public libraries, city government buildings, and other public spaces. These kiosks operate similarly to a bank ATM; they give relevant information on activities for youth in the community and they print out maps on how to access the resources. In addition to the kiosks, the City of Detroit's Youth Services Division now hires young people to help maintain and analyze the data collected through Community YouthMapping.

For municipal leaders who are just beginning to explore options for involving young people in local government, the prospect of interacting and working with youth on a regular basis can be uncomfortable or even somewhat intimidating. Youth on Board, a national non-profit organization dedicated to youth leadership development, has developed a broad range of materials and advice to help adults and youth work more effectively together. Drawn from its work and cities' experiences, here are some useful tips to consider:

Work to overcome preconceptions.
The ways that young people talk, dress, or wear their hair can evoke wide-ranging, and sometimes markedly negative, reactions from many adults. Differences in background, language, and culture can also lead to these reactions. Yet when adults reach out in a manner that is positive, clear, considerate, and respectful, they open new channels of communication and often discover that their initial judgments and assumptions were way off the mark. A willingness to listen and see youth for who they are is the crucial foundation for genuine partnerships and collaboration.

Orient and meet regularly with young leaders.
A thorough orientation when young people join a new council or board is extremely important. For youth to be full and active participants, they also need materials in advance (last-minute faxes won't work), time to prepare for meetings, and a chance to evaluate and discuss them afterwards. To stay on track, adult leaders or staff should meet with young people for at least a few minutes before and after each meeting.

Make meetings interactive.
Activities like "go arounds" and "brainstorms" ensure that everyone has a voice in the decision-making process. They create a dynamic environment that will engage all participants, and they can play a key role in ensuring that youth are heard.

Allow young people to lead.
Committee positions and other visible leadership roles should include young people whenever possible. Involving youth deeply in governance fosters their fullest participation and ensures that they are included in important business that occurs between meetings.

Encourage youth to network with their peers.
Young people's impact and effectiveness grows when they have the chance to discuss their work, learn new skills, and support one another. This kind of networking re-energizes youth and gives them a broader perspective on local governance.

Respect young people's needs.
Changing school schedules, transportation difficulties, and lack of access to computers all can pose obstacles to youth participation. Even simple steps, such as providing bus passes as is done in Indianapolis, Indiana, or rotating meeting schedules so that every youth can attend at least some sessions, can help overcome these barriers. In general, young people's competing demands and personal conflicts may differ from those of adults, but they deserve the same consideration in planning meetings and other activities.

Institutionalize young people's involvement.
Amendments to local ordinances or statutes can give young people a permanent role in local decision-making and leadership. These steps bolster young people's confidence that other youth will follow in their footsteps and help convince them that the city's commitment to youth participation is "for real."