

# ADVISING 101

## HELPFUL HINTS ABOUT LOTS OF THINGS

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There are few things in life more rewarding than being a YMCA Youth & Government Advisor.

How's that for a bold opening statement? Well, it's the absolute truth, as a Youth & Government (Y&G) Advisor, you will have the opportunity to facilitate a life-changing experience for a group of teenagers, and in the process, have a life changing experience of your own. It doesn't get much better than that.

As a Y&G Advisor, you will embark on a series of adventures that you may have never imagined, with people you never thought you'd meet, in places you never thought you'd go (like Camp Roberts). And when you're done, you'll have memories that you'll cherish for a lifetime.

So now that we've set the stage, let's jump right in and learn what we need to know about Y&G to make those opening paragraphs come true. The following information is designed to help new and almost new (slightly used) advisors by highlighting some details of things you may want to focus on.

### **RECRUITING**

If you are new to Y&G and are attempting to recruit students to join the program, you may feel yourself to be at a serious disadvantage. How can you ask people to participate in something you have never attended? There are actually a number of resources available to help you:

- ☐ Attend the Y&G Advisor Development Conference held in September in Bakersfield. With over 150 advisors and staff in attendance, you will have plenty of helpful resources at your fingertips.
- ☐ Read this manual. You'll be much better able to explain the program.
- ☐ Use your returning delegates both to help you understand the program and to make recruiting visits with you.
- ☐ Call other YMCAs in your area that have Y&G programs. Their advisors can help you develop a good recruitment strategy.
- ☐ Call the Y&G office at 916-756-0230.

The earlier you can begin recruiting the better. There is a lot to be done in Y&G, and the quicker you are able to get started, the more time you'll have with your delegates.

High schools generally welcome organizations like the Y to present information on programs as long as they receive reasonable notice. The best contacts at the school are often the Student Activities Directors and the school counselors. If you can get in to talk to the Leadership class or the Student Council, that is often the best place to start. Many students in the school will follow in the steps of their own student leadership. If you have any returning delegates who are attending the school at which you are recruiting, have them do the presentation along with you.

Teenagers will often be more responsive to what an adult is pitching to them if they are also hearing the pitch from one of their peers.

When talking to the students, sell the program first and then you can answer questions of cost. It is much easier to talk money when they are excited about the concept.

If you do have returning delegates, you may find that they are your best recruiters. If they had a good experience the year before, they will usually be willing to bring many of their friends into the program. Set up a meeting with them before you begin recruiting, to organize their efforts and to ensure that they recruit from all three grades (sophomore thorough senior.)

## **Parents**

### **Why Parents?**

As an advisor, you will want to develop and maintain good relationships with your delegates' parents. You may find that these parents become some of your most valuable resources for the growth and development of your program. Getting to know the parents can help you...

- ☐ When it's time to recruit new delegates. Parents are great in spreading the word among their peers.
- ☐ When it's time to collect program fees.
- ☐ When you need community contacts to work with your delegation. Your delegates' parents may know of good speakers for your meetings, e.g., judges and lawyers to help work on your court cases, etc.
- ☐ Talk about the program at Parent's Night.

Getting to know the parents also affords you another opportunity to praise the good efforts and successes of your delegates. When you return from a conference, don't pass up the chance to walk a delegate, to her/his parent's car and tell the parents, in front of the delegate, what a wonderful job the delegate did. Parents love to hear great things about their kids, and kids (even if they don't always admit it) like to be praised in front of their parents.

## **Parent Handbook**

The Y&G office produces a very useful handbook that may be copied and distributed to your delegate's parents. This handbook gives an overview of Youth & Government, the conferences, the staff, advisors and volunteers. It includes a section on the code of conduct, dress code and disciplinary actions. It also contains information on what local YMCAs and the Y&G office provide, and a picture of the Y&G paid staff. The handbook closes with the emergency contact numbers for the various conferences.

This handbook is a valuable tool for communicating the program to your delegate's parents. It is a good idea to mail a copy to the parents a couple of weeks prior to your parent's meeting. It will allow them to learn about the program and bring questions to the meeting. In many cases, it will answer the questions for you. Some delegations augment the Parent Handbook with their own information so the parents may have it all in one place. For instance, some delegations add:

- ☐ An overview of the delegation
- ☐ Photos and bios of the advisors
- ☐ Meeting and conference schedule
- ☐ Program budget and payment schedule

## **Parent's Night**

One of the most important events that you will hold before T&E I is your delegation Parent's Night. As you will be taking their children away several times in the coming months, it's important that they meet you. This is also your opportunity to make sure they understand the program, their financial obligations and the ramification of the code of conduct. This is also a great time to collect all of the necessary paperwork. Most delegations make this event mandatory for both parents and delegates.

Here is an annotated sample agenda for a Parent's Night:

- **Welcome**- If you have a strong delegation President who is comfortable speaking to adults, you may want to have them MC the evening, or the delegation President and the lead advisor may MC together.
- **Introductions**- Have the delegation officers and advisors introduce themselves so that everyone knows who the leadership is.
- **Program Overview**- If you have experienced delegates who can give a clear, somewhat linear overview of the program, they are your best bet. You may have just one do it, or split it into parts (meetings, conferences, etc.) to give more of your delegates the opportunity to speak. It is important to prep your delegates beforehand to help them structure their presentations so the parents aren't confused about what happens when (Supplying parent's with the handbook prior to the meeting helps with this as well.).
- **Debate (with a twist)**- Holding a debate is a great way to give parents a feel for the types of things that happen at Y&G. In this case, it's a debate with a twist. You'll want to choose a topic that is timely, somewhat controversial and where the delegates and parents would tend to be on opposite sides. Here's how it works:
  - o Ask for three parents and three delegates to do a debate
  - o Give them the topic
  - o Tell them which side they will be arguing (for instance, if the topic is lowering the drinking age to 18, have the parents argue in favor of it and the delegates argue against it)
  - o Give them a few minutes to develop their arguments
  - o Hold the debate, giving each side time for rebuttal

Some great things happen in these debates. The parents are impressed by how well their kids do. The kids are impressed by how well their parents do. Having the debaters argue a side they might not normally take is often good for a few laughs. The parents get some insight into the program.

- **Y&G from a Parent's Point of View**- One of the best ways to get across to the parents the value of Y&G is for them to hear about it from their peers. If you have parents with delegates who are returning for a second or third year, or have delegates who have had siblings in the program, contact them in advance and ask them if they would be willing to share with the group why they like the program, and why they are willing to let their children continue to do it. Ask them to focus on what their child has gotten from the program, how they have charged, how they have grown. Hearing parents of returning delegates talk about what Y&G has done for their child helps new parents feel comfortable sending their own children. Be prepared for a few tears as some parents, and advisors, may get a bit emotional about the effect the program has had on their child's life. The lead advisor should emcee this portion of the program.
- **Ground Rules**- If you accomplish nothing else at your Parent's Night, you want to do this. It is critical that parents understand ground rules and the ramifications of breaking these rules. 3:00 on a Sunday morning should never be the first time a parent hears that they are responsible for paying for the transportation of their child home for breaking a ground rule. This is also a good time to go over the Code of Conduct for the program. The parents will appreciate the fact that the program is enforcing the kind of behavior that they would expect at home and also very much appreciate the fact that the adults in the program abide by the same rules.

- ☐ Nut and Bolts- This is your chance to review money, schedules, medical release forms, etc... Do NOT try to hide the price of the program from the parents. As this is one of the biggest questions parents have about the program, be up front and honest with about it.
- ☐ Q&A- This is your chance to answer any remaining questions the parents may have.

Depending on the timing and location of your meeting, you may wish to have refreshments available. Having any handouts broken out into packets and handed out to parents as they walk in the door helps you to match names and faces as well as keeping track of attendance.

## **Meetings**

The greatest opportunities that you will have with your delegates as a group will take place at your weekly meetings. Between September and February, you will have the chance to take them through a whole range of experiences, challenging them to grow, offering them opportunities to think about new ideas and possibilities, supporting them as they take new risks.

### **Physical Environment**

The environment you create in your weekly meetings, including physical as well as social, will help to determine the success of those meetings. To create a good physical environment, take some time to think about how you want your delegation to interact, and then look at how you can facilitate those interactions. Since over the course of a meeting your delegates may play a game, break into small groups, have a large group activity, etc., you will need to be able to easily transition between these activities without having to rework your space each time.

One very successful way of configuring your meeting space is to have no furniture whatsoever, with everyone just sitting on the floor. This accomplishes a few things:

- ☐ You can easily do different types of activities without having to move things around in between.
- ☐ When someone does rise to speak, it is easier for everyone to see and hear.
- ☐ It is very easy to break into small groups.
- ☐ It is unlike a classroom (this is important!)

If your meeting space does not allow you to clear out your area, you may still be able to reconfigure to some extent. The more your delegates feel on equal footing, the more comfortable they can become. This will also be good training for your delegation officers, learning how to lead in different, physical environments.

### **Opening Meeting**

The first meeting that you hold will help to set the tone for the year. It may also determine the number of teens you have interested in participating. Your opening; meeting need not be too complex, as the idea is to get the attendees excited about the programs and send them home with enough information that their parent's can get an understanding as well. The important things for you to get by the time they leave are some basic information about them (name, grade, phone number) and a sense of whether they'll come back the following week. Here is a sample outline for the first meeting:

- ☐ Welcome
- ☐ Introductions (whole group activity)- Have them give their name, grade, school and how they came to be at the meeting (who invited them, etc.)
- ☐ Introduction of the Delegation Officers and Advisors
- ☐ Program Overview (whole group activity)- This is often best done by a combination of advisors and returning delegates, Prep your delegates in advance to ensure that their presentation is somewhat linear.

- ☐ Nuts and Bolts (small groups)- If you can do so, this is best done in small groups, with each advisor taking a group. This is the time where you would distribute the calendar, costs sheet, registration form, etc. On the registration form, at a minimum you want to get the following:
  1. Name
  2. Address
  3. Phone
  4. Email
  5. Grade
  6. Date of birth
  7. Parents first and last names (and address if different than delegate) You'll want to collect these forms before the delegates leave the meeting.
- ☐ Ground Rules (whole group)- This is where you cover the Y&G rules (No sex, alcohol, drugs, double-standards, or smoking) and the proximity rule plus any other delegation rules that you have.
- ☐ Q&A (whole group)
- ☐ Closing (whole group)- Ask for a show of hands at the end to see who thinks they are going to participate in the program.

## **Role Selection Meeting**

Shortly after returning from T&E I, your delegation will go through a process of role selection. With your delegates having gone through the role exposure workshops at T&E I, you anticipate that they are fully versed in the ins and outs of each role. A main reason for doing the workshops is so that they may make an educated choice on what role they would like to play in Y&G. Oh, that it would be that easy. You must be prepared to answer questions from your delegates about what various roles do. There are a few things to keep in mind as you go into the role selection process:

- ☐ The online registration process for T&E II will have
- ☐ All Freshmen are in the Forum and do not count on the role allocation.
- ☐ No matter how hard you try, not everyone is going to be fully satisfied with his or her role at the end of this process.

There are no exceptions to the role allocation numbers. For instance, you may not arbitrarily decide to have one more Senator and one less Appellate Court member. The numbers in each program area are allocated based on our predicted number of participants and space considerations.

"So," you ask, "how do I go about getting the roles selected as fairly as possible?" The first step is to establish up front with your delegates your criteria and methodology for allocating the roles. If you have more delegates choose a role than you have allotted spaces, you can then move to your tie-breaking procedures. Let's take a look at some possibilities for criteria and methodology:

1. Criteria
  - ☐ Meeting attendance
  - ☐ Meeting participation
  - ☐ Grade level (don't forget that Freshmen ALL go to the Forum)
  - ☐ Past participation
  - ☐ Previous role
  - ☐ Bill author

2. Methodology

The following is an example of the methodology used by a delegation in the Bay Area which is similar to methods used throughout the state:

- The week after T&E I, sophomore, junior and senior delegates receive a handout containing a brief recap of each of the roles, a breakdown of the role allocation for the delegation, and a sheet asking them to list their:
  - ☐ Name
  - ☐ Grade
  - ☐ Previous role (if applicable)
  - ☐ 1st choice of roles
  - ☐ 2nd choice of roles
  - ☐ 3rd choice of roles
- The delegates are instructed to bring their completed list the following week and to turn it in no later than the beginning of the meeting. If they are unable to attend, they must send their list in with someone else. It is important to stress to the delegates that you will try your best to give them the role they desire, but within the constraints of the role allocation, you cannot make any guarantees.
- 3. The advisors create one sheet per role with the role allocation number at the top and enough room to list the names of all the delegates who list the role as one of their choices. (If your bill author(s) wish to be in either the Senate or Assembly, spaces are set aside for them.)
- 4. The advisors collect all of the lists at the meeting.
- 5. If any of the roles have more requests than allocated slots, a determination is made as to who gets the slot and who slides over to their second choice. This is done based on the criteria that you have established. In some cases, it may get down to the delegate's third choices.

While this process may seem a little laborious, it accomplishes a few things. It gives the delegates a shot at determining their fate. It helps them to learn the process of negotiation and compromise. It gives the delegates as much power as possible.

## **Officer Training and Sacramento**

Although the Sacramento conference officially starts on Thursday, any of your delegates that were elected to statewide leadership (and many of the appointed positions) will be required to arrive on Wednesday for additional training. There is no additional charge to your delegates for the extra night in the hotel. The Y&G office will assign rooms in advance. The delegates will be in these rooms for this night only. Delegates will receive a letter notifying them of their expected arrival time and whether they have to bring a sleeping bag. Delegates will pick up their keys at the Y&G desk at the hotel. Once at the hotel, the delegates will be under the supervision of the Y&G program, and the deans will be on duty. All of the Y&G rules and codes of conduct apply on this training day. Delegates will need to be in dress code when they arrive. Delegation advisors do not attend the training on this day

If your delegates are flying in, call the Y&G office in advance to arrange for them to be picked up. If you or someone else is bringing the delegates yourself, you must check them in with the Y&G office so we know they are there. Delegates are not allowed to drive themselves to the conference.

## **Conferences**

We won't go into too much detail here, since we have a great handout that deals specifically with the conferences. Here are some brief notes....

### **Who or What is Bob?**

Bob is the name affectionately given to Camp Roberts (hence the "Bob"), the location of the November and January Training and Elections Conferences (T&E I and II). Located on Highway 101 about 45 miles north of San Luis Obispo, Camp Roberts is an active army base and one of the few centrally located places in California that can accommodate the 2,200+ participants we bring to these conferences.

### Bob I, Bob II and Sac Prep

For your new delegates and advisors, and maybe you too, T&E I will be their first statewide Y&G experience. It is important to prepare yourself and your delegates for this experience. For some of you, this may be the first time visiting a working army base, sleeping in barracks, showering with others. These things must be talked about before you leave for the trip. At a minimum, you will want to review the code of conduct and the ground rules. But this is also a good opportunity to really fine-tune the group building you have been doing, with a special focus on living together, as the barracks and hotel will afford them the chance to practice their large group living skills.

### Post-Bob I & II

It is highly recommended that you have a delegation meeting a few days after returning from each of the conferences. Your delegation will really benefit from being able to talk about the experience they just had together and also needs to be allowed to process it as a group. Taking the time to do this will help you to cement the bonds that are being formed in the delegation.

### Post-Sac

After such a powerful experience as the Sacramento conference, it is important to hold at least one follow-up meeting with your delegates to help bring closure to the experience and to talk about the future. Although some delegations end their program year at Sacramento, many continue to meet in one form or another after the conference. This is especially true of delegations that plan to attend Spring Conference. Some examples of post-Sacramento meetings include:

- ☐ Delegation closing, allowing delegates and advisors to talk about their Y&G experience
- ☐ Delegation awards dinner
- ☐ Delegation dinner with parents
- ☐ Further delegation activities
- ☐ Planning for Spring Conference

## **What The Y&G Office Can Do For You**

The Y&G office is here to be a resource for you, and the staff is always willing to take your questions via calls, faxes and emails to help you in any way they can. An advisor should never feel that they don't have somewhere to go for assistance and answers. Between this manual, the Advisor Development Conference, and the office staff, you have plenty of places to go for help. With the amount of detail that is needed in some areas of the program, it is often less work for a staff member to talk to you several times about an issue than to try to fix it after the fact. Our office hours are between

## **Deadlines: What They Mean To You And Your Delegates**

There are several deadlines over the course of a Y&G year, and it is important to understand the ramifications of missing those deadlines:

- ☐ If your conference payments are not in on time, your delegation may not be allowed to participate.
- ☐ If you fail to submit your delegation legislation on time, your delegation may not be allowed to participate.
- ☐ If any of your candidate's applications for office are not submitted on time, the candidate will be disqualified and barred from running or applying for an office.

As an advisor, you would never want to put your delegation in a position that precluded their participation in the program, but over time it has happened that advisors (and delegates) have missed deadlines and therefore missed opportunities. The strict adherence to the deadlines is not meant to be a punishment to

Y's that fail to meet them. The rules are in place because so much work is predicated on the receipt of the paperwork and any delay is both unfair to those who met the deadline and unfair to those whose work depends upon it.

### **Delegation Size (What's The Big Deal?)**

In the course of the Y&G program year, you may encounter questions or statements expressed about delegation size:

- ☐ What's the right size?
- ☐ Why do some delegations have 10 and some have 80?
- ☐ We'll only be powerful if we are a large delegation.
- ☐ The large delegations dominate in the elections.
- ☐ Etc.

Delegation sizes have varied over the years, depending upon a number of factors, including advisor retention, continuity of branch staff and support, and the experiences the returning delegates relate to new recruits. The issue of "what is the right size for a delegation has been debated for years without any consensus achieved. In reality, that is because the focus has been in the wrong place. The focus should not be on the size of the delegation, but rather on the experience of the delegates. That is really all that matters. Advisors should base the size of their delegation on their ability to facilitate a quality experience for their delegates. It is easy to get caught up in the fallacy that the quality of the experience is dependent upon having a large delegation. This is where good advising skills are called upon. Helping your delegates understand the dynamics of size, power and their own feelings a value may help diffuse their concerns.

### **Bill Hearing**

Writing a bill is a new and exciting experience for your delegates. It is also somewhat overwhelming for many the first time they do it. Be sure that you have your delegates start thinking of ideas at the beginning of the school year. Contact a local attorney and ask if you can use his/her law office and library for a couple of nights. Attorneys will really enjoy the interchange and can be very helpful by spending time working with you. They are able to work with the delegates in researching appropriate reference codes. In time you will find attorneys who look forward to this process each year. If you have no contact with an attorney you can contact your local senator or assemblyperson's office and often their field representative will help you. Some delegates will want to work in teams on bills (especially the new ones) and some will work by themselves. Both ways are very appropriate.

Mid-November is a good time to hold your Bill Hearing night. This will give you enough time to fine tune the chosen bill and have it typed correctly and signed. There are three main purposes for holding Bill Hearing nights:

- 1) To select the bills which will go to Sacramento
- 2) To involve local dignitaries in the Y & G process
- 3) To give delegates an impressive experience as well as due attention and recognition for their bills

Hold the bill hearings in your County Court House. Some delegations get together and share the same location and panel judges. The panel of "judges" can consist of:

- 1) The Mayor - or a member of City Council
- 2) A County Supervisor
- 3) A State Senator or Assemblyperson
- 4) A local judge (and you may be able to use his/her chamber)
- 5) An Editor of your local newspaper
- 6) A member of the Y Board of Directors



Each judge is given a packet of information, including a copy of each proposed bill, and evaluation sheet for each bill (subject, completeness, presentation, etc.), and a pamphlet of Y&G. The bills are presented with the student introducing him/herself and any co-authors, the purpose of the bill, and why he/she wants it passed. The panel then has 3-5 minutes to ask questions of the author(s). The bill is judged on merit, preparation, and presentation. The highest scoring bills for each delegation are selected to go to Sacramento. Parents and friends are encouraged to attend. The evening is usually very well received and generates lots of "good will" for your group and the YMCA. When several delegations jointly hold this event it begins the process of networking and allows your delegates to get to know their counterparts from other YMCAs.

Invitations to dignitaries take place first by a telephone call giving an overview of the program and event. This should take place in early October. Follow up your call by a confirming letter stating time, date and place of the hearing, as well as a request for them to arrive five minutes early for a brief orientation. Two to three days before the event make a reminder call. The advisor(s) make all of these arrangements. After the hearing, the Chairperson and Secretary of the delegation write thank you notes to all of the judges.