

# Overview of AZ Youth Service and Leadership Organizations

## Schools/Government

There are Youth Councils/Commissions/Tasks Forces in many AZ cities, towns and counties and for many municipal departments—especially Health Departments—focused on a variety of youth prevention efforts and Parks and Recs to help design teen focused programming. AZ Arts Commission is a State government entity that has a robust Arts Youth Council.

The AZ School Board recently started a Student Advisory Council and the Arizona Charter Board is launching their first Student Advisory Council during the 2024-2025 school year. Some school districts and charter schools have youth sit on their board. Schools have a very rich student council/governments. Youth Advisors to Youth Commissions/Councils shared that many youth that participate in Youth Councils/Commissions have prior experience on their school student councils.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## Interviewed 18 AZ Youth Councils/Commissions:

- **Average size:** 20 youth; Biggest is 50 (Mesa)
- **Eligible Youth:** Typically high school students who are residents or attend school in that city or town.
- **Reasons Created:** Youth engagement in local government and to get youth feedback and input for government programs and services— especially those that affect youth.
- **Most Meet in Person:** 14/18; 3 hybrid; 1 virtual
- **Service:** Service is a major component of most Commissions/Councils. One requires 20 hours throughout the year. Youth often volunteer for city sponsored events. Some youth create their own service or policy initiatives as part of their service.



# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

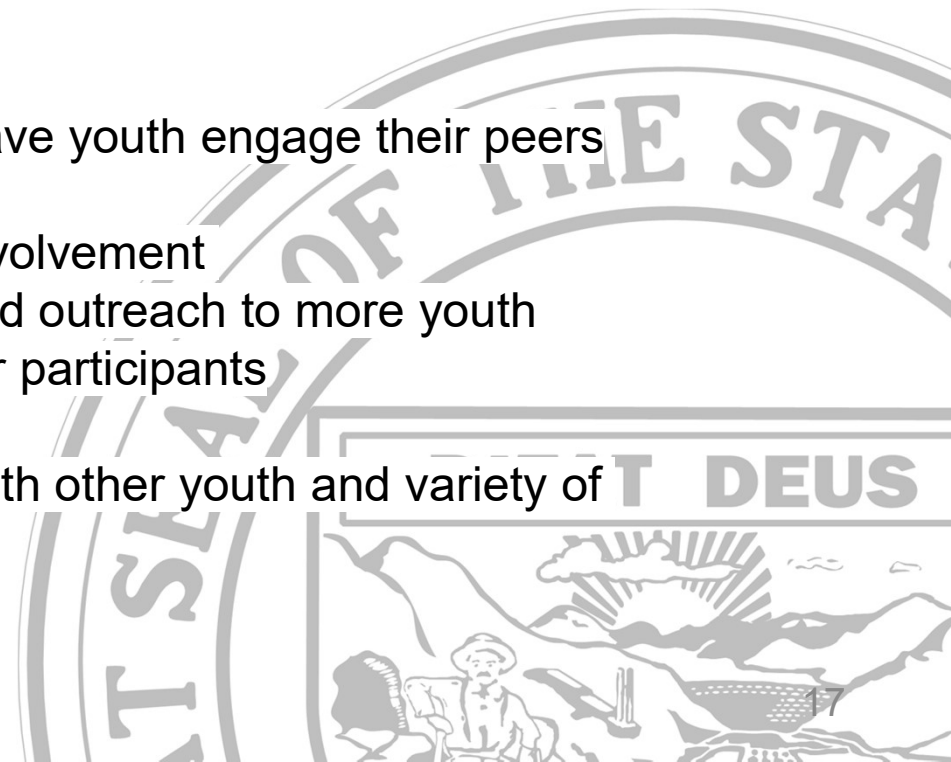
**Collaboration:** Many collaborate with the Mayor's Office and City Council. Often work closely with Parks and Rec. Many youth on these councils also interact with many other City Departments. Some experiences include job shadowing with City Council members.

## What is going well:

- Youth engagement and participation - often have youth engage their peers
- Support for students and flexibility
- Innovation in government because of youth involvement
- Leverage youth for community involvement and outreach to more youth
- Education and developmental opportunities for participants
- Youth recognition
- Interpersonal connections and relationships with other youth and variety of professionals



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## What could be improved:

- Structural Issues (especially those that are Commissions needing to reach quorum and subject to open meeting laws)
- Challenges with recruitment of youth - particularly diverse youth and not just the same youth that are involved in everything
- Retention - Keeping selected students engaged (Youth are very busy, transportation challenges)
- Want more opportunities to connect students with other students and leadership opportunities outside their community
- Building a year or multi-year program
- Need more resources (staff and funding) especially for councils with over 20 youth
- Helping youth understand the importance of their voice and participation in local government for the long-term
- Creating roles and responsibilities that empower students and give them a sense of ownership.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

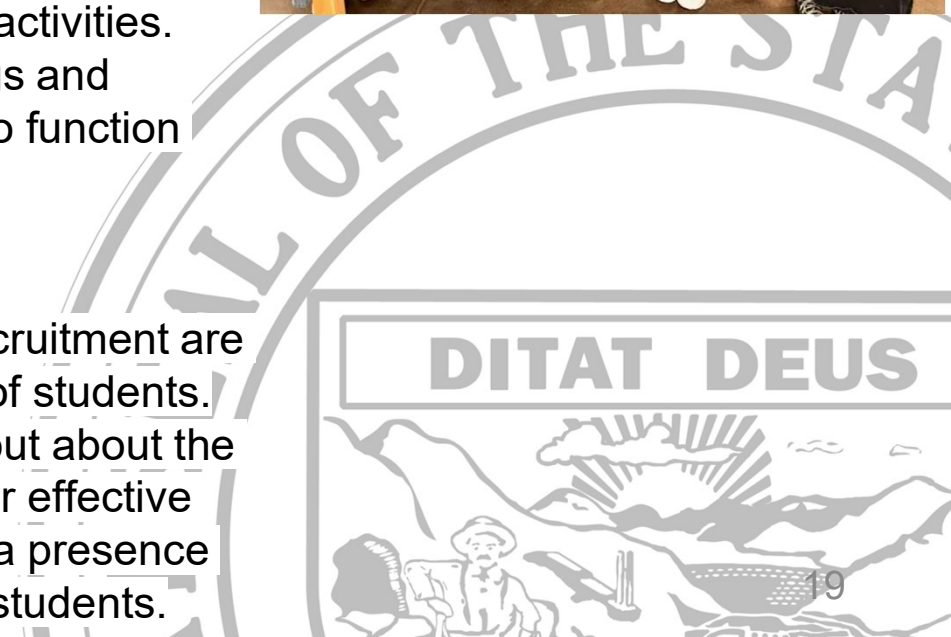
## Challenges to Overcome Obstacles for More Youth Service and Leadership:

### 1. Funding and Resources

- There is a need for increased funding to support various activities and opportunities for youth councils/commissions. Budgeting and sponsorship from external organizations are necessary to sustain and expand the council's activities.
- Access to transportation and space for meetings and events is limited, affecting the council's ability to function effectively.

### 1. Engagement and Recruitment

- Efforts to increase student engagement and recruitment are crucial, especially in reaching a diverse group of students.
- Challenges in marketing and getting the word out about the youth council's existence and benefits. Need for effective communication strategies, such as social media presence and collaborations with schools to reach more students.



# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## Challenges to Overcome Obstacles for More Youth Service and Leadership:

### 3. Balancing Commitments and Accessibility:

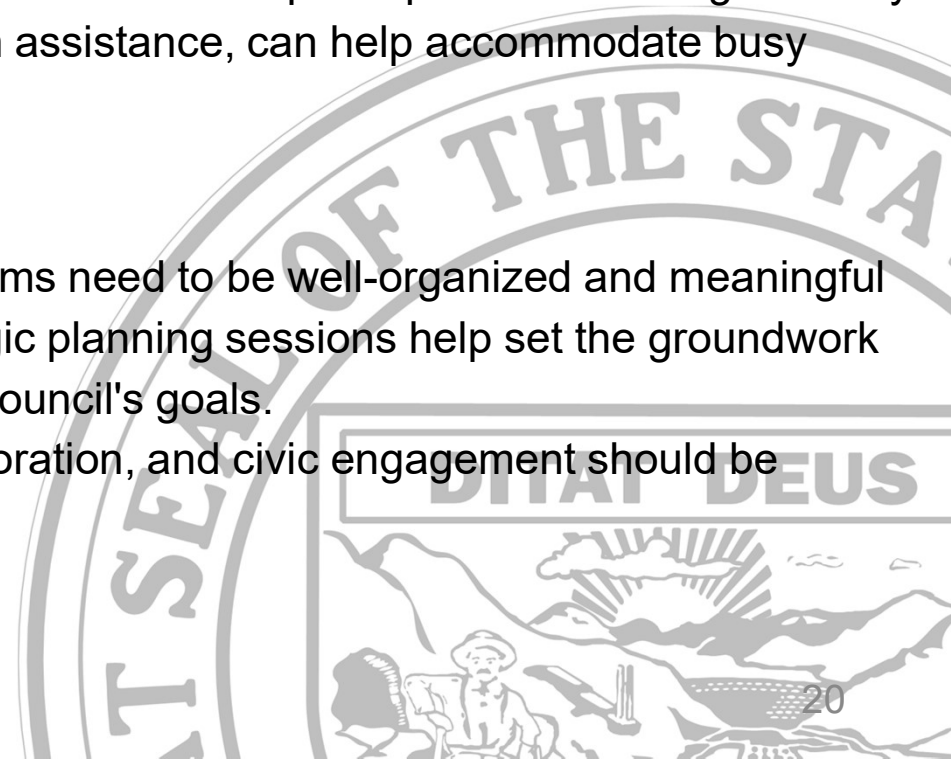
- Youth council members often have many commitments, including school, sports, and other extracurricular activities, making it challenging to maintain consistent participation. Providing flexibility and support, such as virtual meetings or transportation assistance, can help accommodate busy schedules and diverse needs.

### 4. Program Structure and Opportunities:

- The structure and scheduling of youth council's programs need to be well-organized and meaningful to keep students engaged. Annual retreats and strategic planning sessions help set the groundwork for youth to plan the year and align activities with the council's goals.
- Opportunities for leadership development, career exploration, and civic engagement should be essential components of the program.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## Challenges to Overcome Obstacles for More Youth Service and Leadership:

### 5. Community and Collaboration:

- Collaboration with other youth organizations, city departments, and community groups is vital to enhance the council's impact. (ex. West Valley; with the Governor's Commission, etc.)
- Resource sharing and partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions can provide additional opportunities and support for the council's initiatives.

### 6. Communication and Outreach:

- Developing effective marketing strategies to increase awareness and participation in the youth council.
- Utilizing various communication channels, such as social media, school announcements, and community events, to reach a broader audience.
- Engaging parents and the community to support and promote the youth council's activities.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## How do they make a difference in your community?

### Impact on Youth Development and Careers:

- Youth Council participation has led to significant personal growth, scholarships, and career paths in municipal government for many members over the years including a current mayor and city council member.
- Activities like mental health initiatives and service projects have had a lasting impact on students, helping them understand and contribute to their communities.
- The program has fostered leadership skills, civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of government operations among the youth.

### Community Engagement, Service and Volunteerism:

- Youth Council members are actively involved in various community service projects, such as coat drives, cleanup efforts, and serving meals at community centers.
- These activities not only benefit the community but also enhance the public's perception of youth involvement and their contributions.
- Collaborations with local businesses and organizations, like the "We care for our teachers" night, "Arts Walk", and "Seniors Prom" have strengthened community bonds.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## How do they make a difference in your community?

### Recognition and Influence:

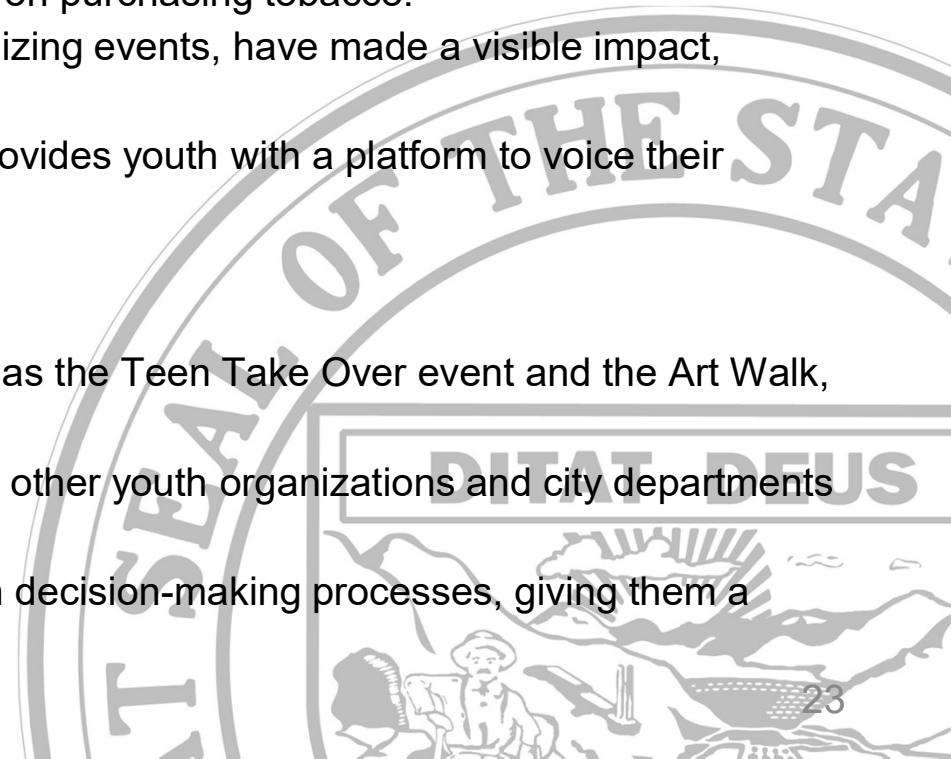
- Some have received recognition for their work. One Youth Council received recognition for its efforts, such as the Governor's Award for changing the age limits on purchasing tobacco.
- Their initiatives and projects, like naming parks and organizing events, have made a visible impact, setting a positive example for future generations.
- Participation in city council meetings and public forums provides youth with a platform to voice their opinions and influence local policies.

### Collaborative Projects and Events:

- The Youth Council collaborates on various projects, such as the Teen Take Over event and the Art Walk, which engage and empower local teens.
- Initiatives like the Teen Symposium and partnerships with other youth organizations and city departments expand the scope and reach of their activities.
- Community surveys and feedback groups involve teens in decision-making processes, giving them a sense of importance and responsibility.



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## How do you measure success?

### Service Hours and Participation:

- The primary metric for evaluating the Youth Council's success is the number of volunteer service hours contributed by the members.
- Attendance at events and participation levels are also significant indicators of the council's engagement and impact.
- Consistent involvement and accountability throughout the year are key measures of the program's effectiveness.

### Community Feedback and Surveys:

- Periodic community surveys are conducted to gather feedback on the Youth Council's activities and initiatives.
- End-of-year surveys and anonymous feedback forms help assess the impact of the program on participants and the community.
- The response from the community, including social media posts and articles, is considered in evaluating the success of various projects and events. (One town's teen events get more likes on social media than all other



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# AZ Youth Councils/Commissions

## How do you measure success?

### Personal and Educational Development:

- Tracking the educational and career achievements of former Youth Council members is a metric of success, such as college admissions, scholarships, and professional development.
- Surveys measuring the knowledge and skills gained by participants, such as public speaking, communication, and event planning, are used to assess personal growth.
- The long-term contributions of former members to society and their continued engagement in community activities are indicators of the program's lasting impact.

### Community Impact and Visibility:

- The impact of projects and initiatives, such as food drives, kit distributions, and community cleanups, is measured by tangible outcomes (e.g., tons of food collected).
- The visibility and recognition of the Youth Council within the community, including awareness among adults and local leaders, are considered metrics of success.
- Efforts to make the Youth Council more present and recognized in the community, especially in areas with older demographics, are ongoing goals.



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# Spotlight: Arizona Youth Arts Council

The Arizona Youth Arts Council of the Arizona Commission on the Arts was started in 2019 because of the need to engage youth in arts education and public art throughout Arizona. It is for high school/early college youth aged 14-19. They engage 15 youth a year—1 per county. They meet virtually from Oct. to May, 1x a month for two hours with assignments in between meetings. They get a letter of agreement that outlines the expectations for serving and the learning outcomes that they hope they achieve.

They learn about how to advocate for arts education. They have a data dashboard about access to arts education throughout Arizona. They go to their schools and superintendent meetings to advocate for more arts in their schools. The Council educates them about public funding and grant making. They also manage an individual youth art grant. It is part of their job to market it, review applications and award winners.

During the first year, staff led the council. The second year, they hired a youth to serve as a youth coordinator to decenter adults. Each year, the youth coordinator takes more responsibility to create a youth focused. They use a model called Creative Youth Development. and use the [Hart's Ladder](#).

Youth get \$800 to participate. They hope to increase that amount in the future to reach more youth that need to get a job rather than serve. Youth on the council have gone on to sit on bigger grant panels with the Arizona Commission for the Arts. Other youth participants have gone on to apply for individual artist grants for adults, too.

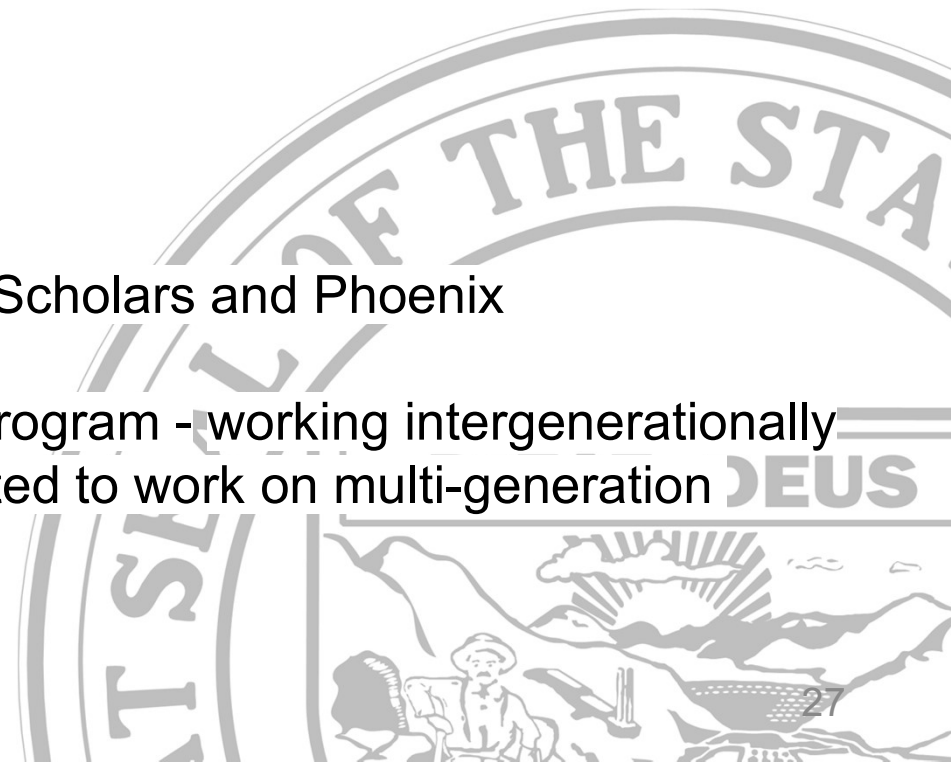


# Spotlight: Valley Leadership - Leadership in Action

- Use a “leadership activation model” more long-term, action oriented
- They have Five Values for “Principles of Doing”:
  1. Building trust
  2. Arizona First
  3. Integrity
  4. Value Facts and Information
  5. Team Mindset
- Collaborated with Institute for Citizen and Scholars and Phoenix Union/PHXCity
- 10-12 youth participate in their Catalyze Program - working intergenerationally
- Figuring out how youth need to be supported to work on multi-generation teams.



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# AZ Based Youth Leaders

Youth interviewed serve on multiple national, state and youth councils and are involved in public health, arts, education, and voter registration.

## 1. Youth Empowerment to Lead:

- Emphasis on youth-led and youth-centered initiatives.
- Expand roles on councils and commissions that amplify youth leadership.
- Youth-led coordination and communication within councils.

## 2. Increase Awareness of Service and Leadership Opportunities:

- Need to better promote all of the opportunities for involvement in Arizona youth leadership projects and service-oriented activities.
- Help youth lead efforts to mobilize youth for service & leadership across the state.

## 1. Access and Equity in Youth Service and Leadership:

- Focus on addressing educational inequities and advocating for under-resourced youth.

Promoting awareness and participation in youth programs for students from diverse backgrounds.

○ The importance of efforts to engage youth from various counties in



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# Draft Recommendations

## Define Terms and Set Goals:

- Develop a Arizona comprehensive definitions for youth service and youth leadership that are more inclusive and expansive than past definitions.
- Establish clear and ambitious goals for youth service and leadership development in Arizona with ways to measure it.

## Build a Statewide Network:

- Create and facilitate an Arizona Youth Service and Leadership Network, co-designed by youth and staff across all program types.
- Connect various programs and initiatives across the state, leveraging existing assets and resources.
- Reestablish the Governor's Youth Commission's annual youth service and leadership convening.
- Provide a platform for youth and staff to offer input on prioritizing state strategies and network with peers.
- Provide professional development opportunities during these events for youth and the staff supporting youth.

## Reduce Barriers to Youth Participation and Increase Youth Led Opportunities:

- Develop and share best practices to reduce barriers to youth participation and more youth-led structures (i.e. youth coordinator role).
- Address financial barriers by providing funds for transportation and offering paid opportunities, and paid internships for more youth to be able to participate and for youth that want to do even more.
- Ensure opportunities are accessible statewide, including in tribal communities—meeting youth where they are.

## Increase Access and Awareness:

- Develop a comprehensive webpage that connects youth to service and leadership opportunities, professional development, and resources designed with/by youth and/or build on AZ Seal of Civic Literacy
- Work with youth to design and maintain the webpage, ensuring it meets their needs and preferences.
- Ensure that language is inclusive so all Arizona youth know that there are abundant, quality opportunities for them to get involved in their community and to develop their leadership skills.



# Recommendations

## Expand State Resources:

- Apply for grants to support the growth of youth service and leadership programs, such as NYLC's Out of School Grant Opportunity (Summer 2025) and Youth Service America State Coordinator role (TBD).
- Connect Arizona youth to paid national fellowship opportunities.

## Link Youth Service and Leadership to Career Readiness:

- Help youth and staff make connections between service/leadership experiences and workforce development.
- Emphasize career readiness through service and leadership opportunities.

## Enhance Quality and Measurement:

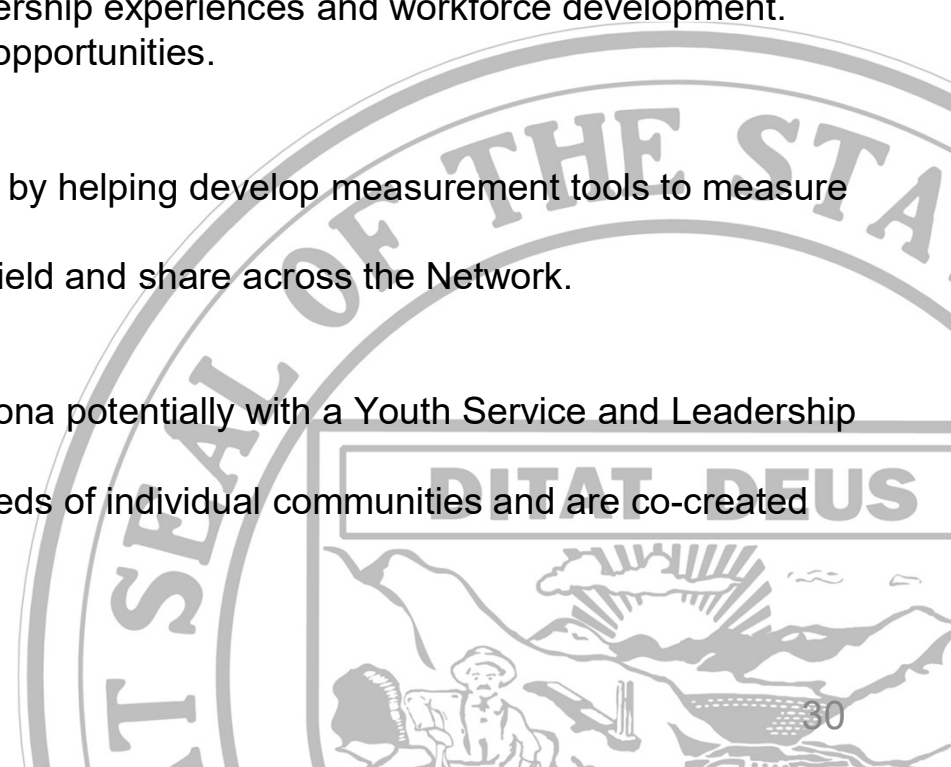
- Improve the quality of youth service and leadership programs by helping develop measurement tools to measure the outcomes of these programs.
- Stay updated with the latest research and innovations in the field and share across the Network.

## Promote Local Design and Innovation:

- Foster innovation in youth service and leadership across Arizona potentially with a Youth Service and Leadership Local Innovation Award.
- Ensure initiatives are locally designed to meet the specific needs of individual communities and are co-created with local stakeholders.



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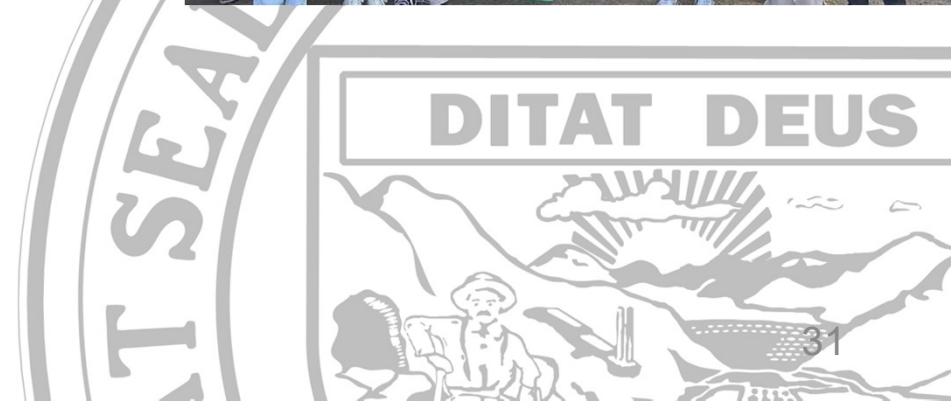
# Interviews

Sarah Silk, Buckeye, AZ  
Mandy Konrad, Benson, AZ  
Jennifer Smith, Douglas, AZ  
Steven Heinsma and Skylar Thomas, Fountain Hills, AZ  
Alexis Apodaca, Chandler, AZ  
Laura Wilson, Sierra Vista, AZ  
Shelby Fenwick, Surprise, AZ  
Mackenzie Valichnac, Keith Johnson, Pinetop-Lakeside, AZ  
Lisa Garcia, Florence, AZ  
Jak Teel, Cottonwood, AZ  
Ruben Aguilera, Tolleson, AZ  
JJ Underwood, Apache Junction, AZ  
Alyssa McDonald, Arizona School Board for Charter Schools  
Ricky Lapaglia, Coolidge, AZ  
Adrian Cascio, Tempe, AZ  
Tim Valencia, Phoenix, AZ  
Shannon Latham, Apache County Youth Council  
Casey Blake, Mesa, AZ  
Jeremy Dyck, Goodyear, AZ  
Christina Lipin, UACE Wildcat Corps  
Raine McAngus, Youth,  
Sara Iyer, Youth  
Andrea Cohen, Center for Jewish Philanthropy  
Kelly Vallo, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona  
KaRa Lyn Thrasher, Center for the Future of Arizona  
Courtney Sullivan, Arizona Center for After School Excellence  
Katherine Cecala, JA Arizona

Kevin Imes, CTE, Arizona State Department of Education  
Dianna Harrier, JAG Arizona  
Josh Stine, Arizona Alliance for Boys and Girls Clubs  
Shena Whitmer, Prescott, YMCA  
Melissa Holston, U of A  
Sophia Linn, Youth  
DeeAnn Arroyo, Chandra Puvvada, The Partnership  
Elisa Radcliffe, AZ Arts  
Melissa Hernandez, United Way of Tucson  
Kristen Hernandez, Girl Scouts of Arizona  
Shannon Etz, Arizona State Board of Education  
Elizabeth Evans, Arizona State University  
Vanessa Eugeno and Jennifer Nguyen, Maricopa County  
David Brown, Valley Leadership  
Donna Davis, State Commissioner  
Julie Ellis, Arizona State Department of Education  
Annie Haseley, Arizona Serve  
Mike Moon, Utah Serves  
Megan Trawick, Volunteer North Carolina  
Rebecca Verhoff, Serve Ohio  
Jessica Sutter, Citizen and Scholars  
Amy Meuers, NYLC  
Michael Minks, YSA  
Kate Scheuritzel, CT Serves  
Kristine Sturgeon, InnerView  
Kameryn Ryan, Volunteer Iowa  
Krysten Dorfman, Earthforce  
Melissa Sherry, Michigan Volunteers



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# Resources

## Youth Participation and Leadership

[Creating Equitable Ecosystems of Belonging and Opportunity for Youth: An Action Guide for Cross-System and Sector Leaders and Practitioners](#) - The Forum for Youth Investment, 2023

[Three Models to Consider When Integrating Youth Participation into Programs](#) - YouthPower

[Young Adult Partnerships](#) - NYLC

[Youth Voice Tip Sheet](#) - NYLC

[Barriers to Youth Participation in Service and the Community](#) (IOWA Youth Survey) - YSA

[Advancing Youth Leadership Development Research](#) - CELO, 2023

## AZ Resources

[Florence Teen Leadership Forum](#) - Sept. 13, 2024

[Phoenix Youth and Education Office Annual Review](#), 2023

## Service Learning

[Equity in Service Learning - Self Assessment Tools for Community Engagement](#) - NYLC

[Getting Started in Service Learning](#) - NYLC, 2021

[Service Learning Action Plan](#) - NYLC

[Pathways to Impact: Service Learning as a Catalyst for State After School Networks](#) - NYLC

[Ready to Engage: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents on SEL and Service Learning](#) - Civic

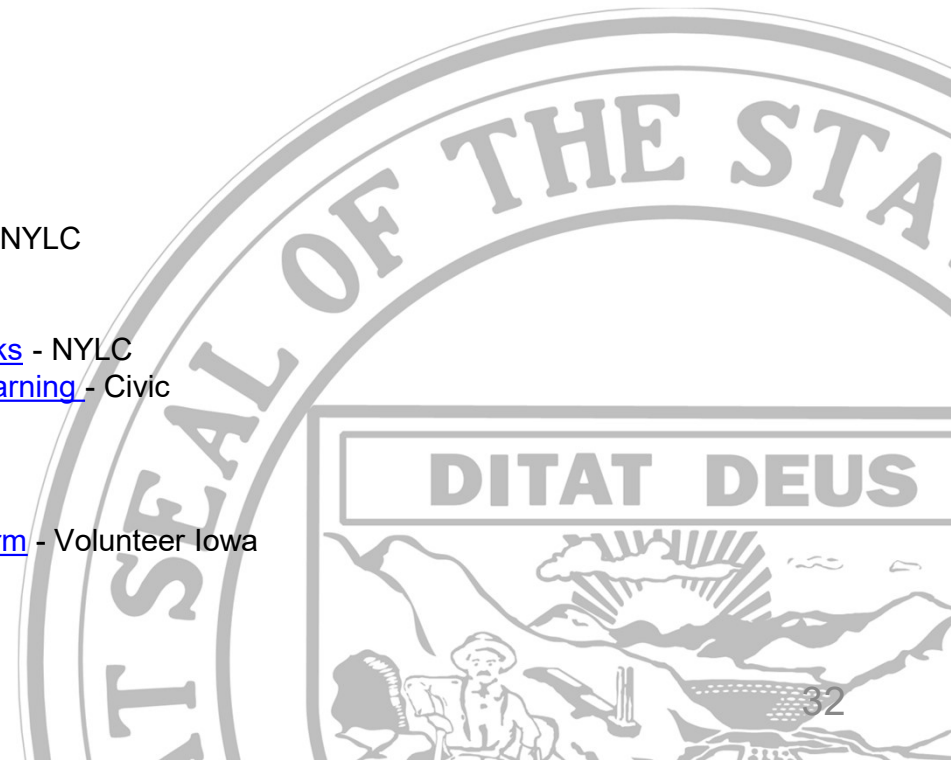
[Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service: A Call to Action](#) - CELO, 2024

## Awareness

[TikTok Toolkit Guide to Promoting Youth Volunteerism on the Social Media Platform](#) - Volunteer Iowa



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# Thank you!



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Thank you to all those taking the time to participate in this project and sharing your insights and experiences. It was invaluable to this research and recommendations to drive meaningful change to grow youth service and leadership in Arizona.

