

Grantmaking



The primary role of the YAC is to recommend grants to the community foundation's board of trustees.

As a result of the needs assessment process, the YAC will have identified its top one or two priorities for grantmaking. The YAC may invite several nonprofit agencies dealing with these priorities to help brainstorm development of a request for proposals (RFP) targeted at the best types of projects that the YAC may wish to support.

Most YACs use an RFP to invite grant applications that will deal with these priorities. There are options in terms of which organizations receive the RFP, including: only youth-serving organizations, all nonprofit organizations or those just dealing with the priority issues, only school systems, or just youth directed programs.

A RFP usually includes a cover letter explaining the priorities of the YAC and special conditions, such as the involvement of youth in development of the grant application. The RFP is attached to a grant application form, a sample of which may be found on the Youth Grantmakers website and customized to meet the needs of your YAC.

Several YACs have issued news releases about their RFPs to stimulate applications. Other YACs have members hand deliver applications to youth-serving organizations. There have been occasions when a YAC has hosted a student/youth conference to highlight an issue and announce a grant program.

In order to maximize the potential of receiving good applications, the RFP should allow up to 60 days for a response, recognizing that some nonprofits and youth groups only meet once a month. It should also offer a grant range, such as \$500 to \$2,000, to reduce the temptation of applicants for requesting much more than the YAC has available to award.

Before proposals are received by the YAC, the YAC needs to establish a process for reviewing and assessing. Generally, all YAC members prefer to review each proposal. However, depending on the number of proposals received, a committee may be assigned to do the first review and recommend the top five or ten proposals for all YAC members to review. As a result of the orientation, YAC members will be familiar with the process used by the community foundation and should be encouraged to mirror it as appropriate.

Many YACs have found it useful to interview the top applicants as they determine their final recommendations to the Foundation board of trustees. Allow no more than 20 minutes for the interview — 10 minutes for a presentation by the applicant and 10 minutes for questions from YAC members. Schedule another 10 minutes between interviews to critique the application. Depending on logistics, the YAC may want to consider holding the interview at the applicant's office.

Several YACs use score sheets as a tool in helping members assess proposals. Whatever the tool, the process of making final decisions on grants can test the leadership and facilitation skills of the youth chair and the advisor. If consensus cannot be reached on grant awards in the scheduled meeting, find the time for another meeting in order to be sure that consensus can be reached and all YAC members can have a comfort level about the final recommendations.

YACs have learned that they must be flexible in helping to identify and work with community organizations that are working to address youth issues. For example, some YACs have discovered that student youth groups do not know how to complete grant applications and as a result have offered training sessions. Others have found that it is helpful to visit the top applicants to insure that youth are involved in the project.

There are times when a YAC may receive little or no response to its RFP. Discouraged but not dismayed, one YAC decided to sponsor a writing contest for junior and senior high students on the subject of how they would deal with the issue of alcohol and substance abuse by youth. The essays generated several good ideas that resulted in a number of grants being funded in the next year's grant cycle. Another YAC decided to invite three nonprofit leaders to meet with it to discuss their funding priority. Two of the agencies received grants as a result of that meeting. The third nonprofit leader could not understand the reason for partnering with the YAC.

YAC's have started to see the importance of involving next generations in philanthropy. Many YAC's have started giving mini-grants to 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, which range from \$100 - \$500. In order to receive a mini-grant, the students learn about philanthropy and how the YAC works. They then brainstorm ideas of ways they could give back to their community, and come up with a project. The students then write a grant to the YAC members requesting funds to implement the project that they just developed.

Presenting their grant recommendations to the community foundation's board of trustees can be a learning experience and a celebration. YAC members need to understand that the board of trustees has the power and authority to accept or reject their recommendations. Encourage the board to schedule a meeting just for this purpose, when YAC members and hopefully parents can attend. YAC members should share the responsibility of presenting verbal reports on the grants being recommended. While several projects recommended by YACs have received intense scrutiny and many questions, only one or two of several thousand grants recommended have actually been turned down. In these cases, it was important for the foundation board to provide an explanation and offer options to the YAC on how to proceed with the proposal.

Foundation staff or the YAC Advisor will need to prepare a written report summarizing both the recommended and denied grants for the board's review and for the written record of YAC activity. This meeting also offers a great opportunity for inviting the local media to attend and interview members of the YAC.

After the foundation has approved the grant recommendations, the YAC can focus on developing both grant agreement letters and denial letters, modeled after the foundation's approved policies and correspondence. Samples of agreement, acceptance and denial letters may all be found on youthgrantmakers.org. The grant agreement letter can be short but needs to include: the purpose of the grant, the method for payment of the grant, a request for a progress report usually within six months or one year of the award of the grant, and a reminder to include mention of the foundation and YAC in any publicity the funded project receives. In addition, site visits may be mentioned in the letter. Several YACs make site visits to funded projects during the course of the next year, or they invite funded project staff to report at a YAC meeting during the year. It is important to request that a signed copy of the grant agreement letter be returned to the foundation indicating that the recipient agrees to the terms of the grant award.

Many YACs have found that writing a denial letter can be the toughest part of their assignment. "Not enough money" is the common reason given for not funding a project. However, it is helpful if the YAC can also offer positive advice on how the grant application can be strengthened for possible resubmission next year.