

# Extension Council Youth Leadership Program Survey Results 2016



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## **Introduction**

The Extension Council Youth Leadership Program (ECYL) survey was a voluntary statewide online survey of County Program Directors and County Extension Council Chairs, designed to capture the current participation and impact of young people on Extension councils statewide.

The 2016 survey, which was previously conducted in 2005 and 2010, captured basic info about youth and young adult participation on councils, recruitment of younger members, roles of young leaders, level of impact on council decisions, and youth/young adult member recognition.

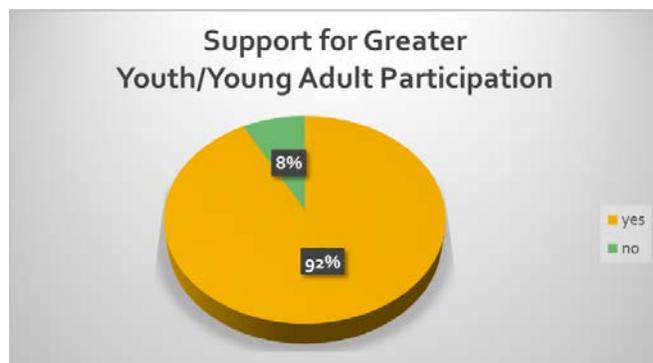
Goals of the survey:

1. To better understand how Extension are councils engaging younger generations
2. To coordinate support for council diversity and leadership development

## **Council Support for ECYL**

Councils were asked about their participation in the ECYL Program, what priority they place on youth/young adult membership, and if they would support greater youth participation on council:

- **92% of responding counties say they would support greater youth (ages 14-17) and young adult (ages 18-25) participation** in Extension Council meetings, yet only 15% say they currently participating in the program.
- **46% say they are aware of the ECYL program**, are planning to participate, or have participated in the past. **39% say they are not yet aware of the program.**
- **78% say their council sees youth and young adult participation as a priority**, although the levels of priority ranged widely. 38% state this is a high priority for their council. 23% say they do not see it as a priority.

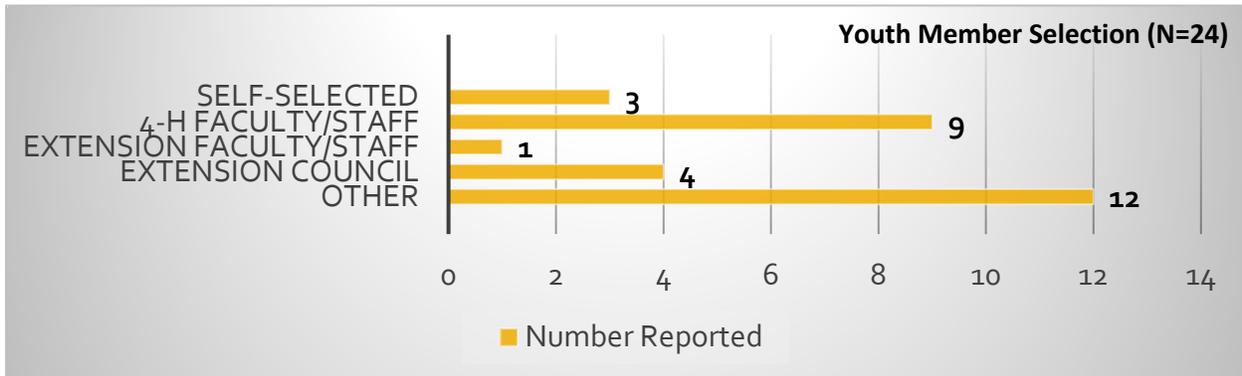


## **Biggest Opportunities**

Councils were asked to identify the most significant opportunities they see for their county engaging youth/young adults on council. The main opportunities identified are:

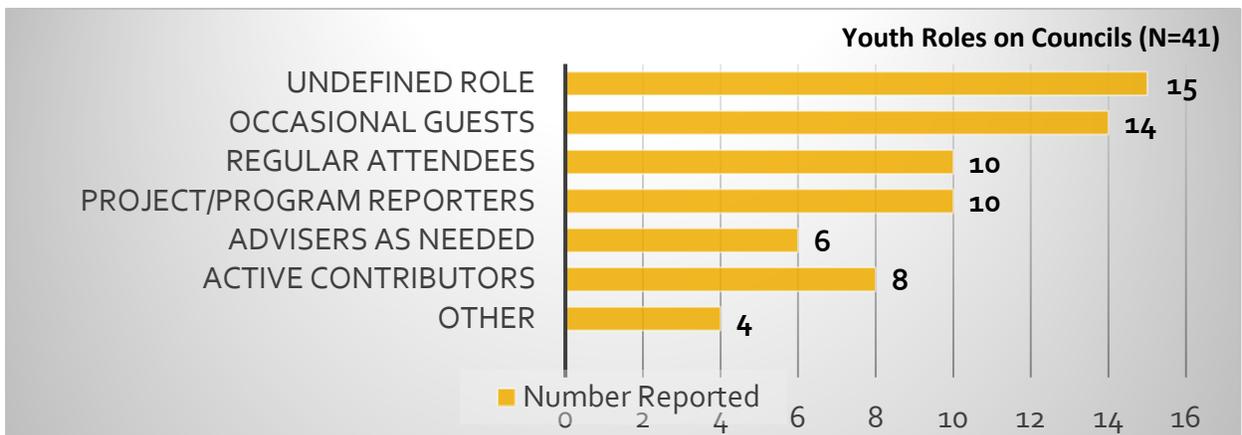
- New energy and perspective at meetings
- Networking for youth/young adults
- Youth learning more about MU Extension and community-based organizations

## Youth Selection and Roles



The most common method for youth selection is 4-H/Extension faculty and staff and council members working together to identify and recruit youth (50%). To a lesser extent, 4-H/Extension faculty and staff (42%) or Extension council members (17%) handle selection alone. In some cases, youth are self-selected who take the initiative or express interest in serving on the Extension council.

Counties use a variety of criteria for youth selection. While the recommended minimum age for non-voting members is 14, some councils look for juniors or seniors in high school (at least age 16). Other councils seek representation from both school districts in the county, ask for input from school counselors, invite youth who are currently 4-H council officers, or look for youth members from 4-H and/or FFA.



The largest percentages of youth who attend Extension council meetings are either in undefined roles (37%) or attend as occasional guests (34%). Approx. 1 in 4 counties say youth are regular attendees of their meetings, or attend to report on specific programs or projects (24%). 20% of respondents say youth are active contributors at Extension council meetings.

Over half of counties indicate they ask youth for input before voting on issues (56%). Other methods councils use to encourage participation include youth serving on committees with adults (44%), recording youth opinions in minutes alongside adult votes (38%), and including a time for youth to speak on meeting agendas (38%).

### ***Impacts on Decision-Making***

Councils were asked to report on youth meeting attendance, youth input, and the level of impact youth have on council decisions:

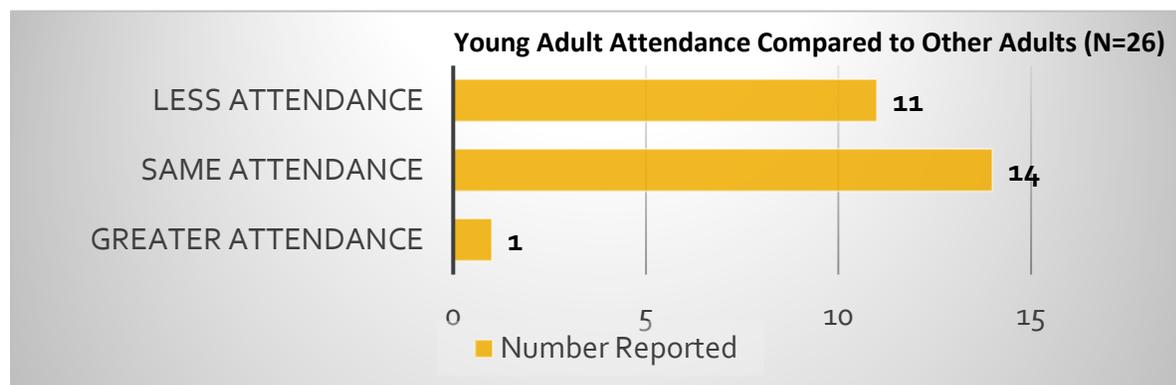
- Slightly more than half of counties indicate youth members attend fewer meetings than adult members (53%). 47% of counties say youth members attend approximately the same number of meetings or more as adult members. **Among councils who have formally added youth as non-voting members, these representatives attend 65% of council meetings.**
- **Councils are split on whether youth members have an impact on council decision making.** Approx. 47% say youth have no impact on decisions. 53% indicate an impact, though the degree of impact varies. 32% feel youth members have either a medium or large impact on decisions.

### ***Young Adult Recruitment***

Approximately 2 in 5 counties say the Extension council has young adult members ages 18-25 as voting members. When councils were asked how young adult members (ages 18-25) are recruited to serve, common responses included:

- **Inviting former youth** representatives ages 18 and older to run
- **Utilizing social media** and word of mouth
- **Tapping contacts Extension Council members or staff** have with young adults or their parents

### ***Young Adult Participation and Impact***



Councils were also asked to report on young adult meeting attendance and the level of impact young adults have on council decisions:

- **The largest portion of counties responding (68%) indicate young adult members have a large or medium impact on decisions** (youth-related and other decisions the council makes).
- **Half of counties reporting say young adult members attend approximately the same number of meetings as other adults (54%).** Forty-two percent of councils say young adult members attend fewer meetings than other adults.

## ***Biggest Challenges***

In the survey, councils were asked to provide feedback on challenges with engaging youth/young adults. **Councils acknowledge they need to be more pro-active on this topic.** One respondent says the county cannot see any downside to engaging younger members. Yet councils indicate **difficulty with recruitment, youth missing council meetings because they also work and play sports, and the need for more training** on what it means for councils to have non-voting youth members.

## ***Existing Resources***

Councils were asked to report on how they utilize existing resources for youth-adult partnerships, such as the Council Training Module, New Youth Orientation, and Youth Recognition Packets. **Most counties report not having used these resources.** Councils that do report utilizing them:

- Hold annual trainings for youth with all new members after elections
- Provide resources to new members at meetings and encourage self-study
- Have youth/young adults participate in ECYL youth orientation webinars
- Award younger members with ECYL recognition materials at annual council meetings

## ***Summary and Conclusion***

As a whole, results indicate the **vast majority of counties** responding to the survey are **interested in engaging younger generations.** Extension councils identify this as a **priority** and would be willing to participate in training to increase youth/young adult participation.

**The challenges faced in finding and involving qualified youth and young adults to serve are real and ongoing in every county.** The ECYL program should provide up-to-date resources for overcoming these challenges, and demonstrating how it is **well worth the effort** toward council leadership development.

With ongoing changes in Extension council members, Extension faculty, and County Program Director roles, ECYL should build **county-by-county awareness of the program**, including current council practices and possibilities.

A significant percentage of councils currently have at least **some level of youth involvement at meetings.** **Councils could realize greater benefits and impacts** by formalizing roles for young people, amending bylaws, and connecting new members with experienced members for guidance and support.

Extension faculty (including 4-H faculty/staff) and council leaders **working together is key** to successfully engaging younger generations on councils.

## ***For More Information***

For more information, please visit the [ECYL website](#) or see these specific resources for councils:

- [ECYL Program Brochure](#) – introduction to ECYL
- [ECYL Training Module](#) – slides, handouts, and facilitator tips for Extension faculty/staff
- [ECYL Youth Orientation Packet](#) – orientation packet for new youth/young adult members
- [ECYL Youth Code of Conduct](#) – code of conduct to be signed by new youth/young adult members