Youth Justice Board

The Youth Justice Board is an after-school leadership development program that gives young people a voice in public policies that affect their lives. During 2014-2016, members of the Youth Justice Board are focusing on the issue of police diversion in New York City.

How It Works

Each program cycle, a team of young people from across New York City investigates a current juvenile justice or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations and works to implement its recommendations. The program has two primary goals: to help members develop skills that will benefit their communities; and to contribute young people’s perspectives to public policy discussions. The project aims to foster ongoing dialogue between policymakers and informed youth leaders.

In the first year of the program’s two-year cycle, Board members conduct extensive research on a select issue, develop and publish informed policy recommendations, and present them to policymakers and key stakeholders. During the second year of the program, members work to implement the recommendations. Each year, new teens representing a cross-section of students from diverse neighborhoods and backgrounds are selected based on their experiences, interests, and commitment to working on a long-term project. Participants include those with first-hand experience of the issues—such as foster care or juvenile justice—addressed by the program. After completion of the project, many alumni stay engaged with the program and pursue other civic activities in their neighborhoods or at school. For example, alumni have served on local community boards, been appointed to statewide government commissions, and held positions in school government.

Training: During the first weeks of the program, members receive intensive training on research strategies, consensus building, listening, interviewing, and public speaking. Members also learn how local government works. The training phase includes a kick-off weekend retreat that provides members with background information on the topic and lays a foundation for teamwork throughout the year.

Fieldwork: The Board designs and implements a research plan that includes interviews, focus groups and site visits with a wide range of stakeholders. During this stage, members meet with experts in the field, community stakeholders, and public officials. Members design and lead focus groups of young people affected by the issue under investigation to learn how it affects their peers.

Policy Development: The Board’s research culminates in the development of targeted policy proposals. The Board issues a final report and presents its policy recommendations directly to government officials and policymakers.

Implementation: The Board works to influence practice in the field by persuading decision-makers to implement its recommendations. Strategies include working directly with officials at government agencies, piloting initiatives and collaborating with stakeholder organizations.

For more information and to download the Board’s publications, please visit: www.courtinnovation.org/yjb