

# Invite more youth into the boardroom

## An important and large component of society is often absent from community boards and committees – youth!

Posted on **August 5, 2013** by **Yvonne (Bonnie) Wichtner-Zoia**, Michigan State University Extension

A [Non-Profit Law Blog](#) article by Emily Chan reveals that the 2007 [National Survey of Children's Health](#) reported approximately 78 percent of youth between the ages of 12-17 participated in volunteer work or community service events that year. However, participation by youth on boards unrelated to youth activities is negligible – less than two percent. Chan goes on to state, however, that “some groups have taken note of this increasingly service-oriented age group and focused discussions toward integrating younger individuals into nonprofit boards (i.e., person under the legal age of adulthood).”

A young professional in my community, Helen-Ann Prince, is a recent college graduate who works with youth on [the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative](#) as well as the [Alcona County FFA Chapter](#). A short time ago I met with Helen-Ann at the [Michigan State University Extension](#) office in Alcona to discuss opportunities to involve young individuals in community organizations and boards.

She shared that as with anyone, no matter what age, young people must feel their volunteer work or community service is meaningful; “Youth are an excellent resource and appreciate it when their input is acknowledged and treated with respect. Sometimes I’ve felt that as a young adult in the professional world, my voice is not heard or considered as valuable as others.”

Prince continued, “People do not like or trust change, yet change provides an opportunity to engage and diversify ones organization. Just because something has worked in the past doesn’t mean it is what is right for the future. Actively engaging youth on community boards and committees may be a change, but there are so many potential advantages for everyone involved.” Our discussion resumed as we brainstormed advantages to organizations when recruiting youth as board members. A short list of the advantages we identified includes:

- Youth are the leaders of tomorrow
- Youth have passion and energy
- Youth bring fresh and new perspectives
- Youth have a whole different consortium of friends with whom they can share organizational resources
- Youth are likely to possess highly honed computer and social networking skills
- Youth provide an opportunity for more experienced board members to mentor

Conversely, we also considered what the benefits may be for a young person to want to participate on a non-youth related board of directors. Interestingly, it is likely their reasons are much the same as any board member – no matter what age:

- Gain skills/experience – to further themselves or their careers
- Have their voice heard
- Give back to the community
- Expand networking opportunities
- Develop a deeper understanding of what it takes to run an organization

While research supports that the number of youth participating in volunteer activities continues to increase - creating more opportunity for youth involvement as board members - it is a good idea to check with state and local legislation before adding youth under the age of 18 to a board of directors. Michigan is one of a handful of states that has legislation that permits youth participation on boards. Several states have no particular youth statutes at all, while others have very specific restrictions. Furthermore, consider adjusting the organizations bylaws and articles of incorporation to make it easy for youth to be included in the boardroom.

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