



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**YMCA OF
GREATER
NEW YORK**

TEENS TAKE THE CITY

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

2013-2014

An Overview

Introduction

Teens Take the City is different from all other teen leadership programs because it is designed to give teens the tools they need to become active influences in their community. The program teaches teens all about New York City government and gives all participants the opportunity to research and debate topics of their choosing. Through the program, teens learn to take action in their community and in the halls of city government.

Purpose

The purpose of the Teens Take the City program is to facilitate the exposure of students to the function of New York City government through an engaging civics curriculum that emphasizes academic, social and leadership skill building.

Overview of Curriculum

The Teens Take the City curriculum links student community activism and civic leadership. There are four (4) components of the Teens Take the City curriculum:

1. “What’s the Problem?”
 - Discussion of Issues
 - Community Exploration
 - Community Mapping
 - Interview Skills
 - Research
2. “What can be done?”
 - Form Policy Groups
 - Research
 - Shaping a Policy Proposal
 - Learning City Government
 - Research
 - Business Etiquette
 - Nominating Teens to run for elected officials at Mid-program
3. “How can WE solve it?”
 - Policy Formulation
 - Taking Action
 - Parliamentary Procedure
 - Public Speaking
 - Listening
 - Debate and Resolution Skills
4. “Taking Action”
 - Community Change Models
 - Service Learning Project in Community



Target Population

Teens Take the City targets middle and high school students from the five boroughs of New York City. Teens Take the City welcomes all students; participation and a respectful attitude are the only requirements.

Structure of Lessons

The lessons in the curriculum cover a 24 week program and minimum of 45 minute class sessions. The lessons overlap, enabling a advisor to review previous lesson objectives as well as allowing for more flexibility during instructional time.

Programmatic Outcomes

Teens Take the City will expose students to the function of New York City Government, through a series of intensive experiential learning program. Teens Take the City has three primary program outcomes.

1. Students will demonstrate increased understanding of the responsibilities and processes of New York City government.

- ☐ Understanding the role and responsibilities of the Executive branch
- ☐ Understanding the role and processes of New York City Council
- ☐ Understanding the job responsibilities of a New York City Councilmember
- ☐ Understanding the origin of legislature and the process of creating legislature in NYC

2. Students will demonstrate strengthened leadership, community organizing and advocacy skills.

- ☐ Coordination of at least one community organizing activity that educates/serves the community
- ☐ Delivery of one presentation or training to peers about an issue that impacts the teens' school, neighborhood or city
- ☐ Meeting with at least one stakeholder in the community and voicing their opinion about an issue of importance
- ☐ Meeting with at least one City Council Member that represents their school, Y or home community
- ☐ Displaying service learning experience via Culmination Event Poster Project.

3. Students will demonstrate strengthened public speaking, listening and communication skills.

- ☐ Delivery of two speeches in front of an audience of 10 or larger
- ☐ Preparation of a policy proposal presentation for an audience of 100 or larger
- ☐ Expression of personal opinions about an issue of importance to both a group of peers and adults

Alignment with NY State Math and English Language Arts Common Core Standards

“The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.”

(commoncore.org)

Why are we using Common Core Educational standards? We are utilizing these standards to help provide clear goals for student learning, so that TTC Advisors, so that they can ensure students are building skills and knowledge, throughout the program, which will prepare them for future academic and career success.

Why do we need to be mindful of these educational standards in our work? By providing a clear outline of the learning of objectives for students, schools are taking a step towards ensuring that all students, no matter where they live, receive high quality education. We need standards to ensure that all youth are prepared for academic and workforce success.

I have heard from many YMCA NYC teens, advisors and have witnessed myself, the inconsistent quality of education our youth are receiving. While, many youth are receiving very solid or outstanding educations, many of the youth involved in our programs at the Y, are not. When youth move on to the next grade, without having gained the skills needed, the challenge for them academically keeps building. It's like starting to play game without being taught the basic rules of the game. As the game continues, others playing, who were taught the rules and understood before beginning, are going to be at an advantage. As the child that never really understood the rules, before beginning, may pick up tips and strategies along the way- but being expected to learn the game while at the same time play the game, can continue to move that child further away from a chance at success.

We have the opportunity, within our Y programs, to figure out where that child or teen is with his or her skills and understanding, and to build from where the youth is. When we have participants who are in 9th or 10th grade, yet still don't seem to have certain 6-8th grade skills developed, we can adapt our expectations and activities, to build the 6-8th grade skill set first.

The Teens Take the City program provides an opportunity to meet youth where they are and continue providing opportunities to move to the next step and build/ strengthen standard skills. The TTC program allows for students with varying levels of understanding and skills, to be in the same club and work together, while each building from where they are.

For example, in a TTC club, the advisor can have the whole group read the same article, but then adjust the questions, based on the participants' level. While middle school participants may be asked to summarize the main argument of the author and pick out the three strongest examples or facts the author used to support his or her argument, a high school junior or senior, may be asked to look at the same things as the middle school group, in addition to being asked to think about how the authors point of view shaped the article, to look at the supporting arguments and to identify facts, opinions and inferences.

Here is an example of how an advisor could have a whole club focusing on the same issue, but utilize the standards to help assure each participant is being challenged at the appropriate level.

- M.S. group may read the article and summarize the central ideas of the article, the main argument and the source of the article. (Standards-RH.6-8.2, RST.6-8.2)
- 9th-10th grade level may be asked to identify the main argument, to list the specific textual evidence used to support the argument and to list the inferences made from the text. (Standard RI.9-10)
- 11-12th grade level may be given the same article and one additional article providing statistics about the issue at hand and be asked to represent the statistics in a graph form. (Math Practice Standards and RI.11-12.7)

NY Standards Resource: Common Core State Standards Initiative Website: <http://www.corestandards.org/>, Copy-write common core state standards initiative 2012 *Teens Take the City Curriculum YMCA of Greater NY*

Using the Teens Take the City Curriculum

Though this curriculum is detailed and specific in nature, advisors are encouraged to adapt and customize the lesson plans to fit the dynamics of their groups. The following guidelines (provided by Overcoming Obstacles: A Program for Success) also help advisors to make concepts and skills relevant to their teens' lives:

- ☐ Substitute or adapt examples and problems to fit the culture of your group.
- ☐ Add current, local, state, or nations events and issues that are of concern to your teens.
- ☐ Adapt questions and introductions to fit the flow of the discussion.
- ☐ Modify activities and group formations to fit the dynamics of your group.
- ☐ Elaborate on ideas or topics that seem to catch the interest of your teens.
- ☐ Review and reinforce information or material presented according to the needs of your teens.

Utilize the TTC Alignment with State Common Core Standards Overview to guide your adjustment of questions and activities to meet the needs of your group and provide level appropriate challenges. There is no need to worry if specific activities and discussions begin to stray from the agenda; instead advisors are urged to listen carefully to the direction that the teens have taken it. The whole point of this curriculum is to provide activities, information, and resources to motivate participants, not to restrain them (or you). The role of the advisor in this program is to help facilitate meetings, encourage civic engagement and effective communication, act as a role model and trusting adult, and make the information dynamic and stimulating to the teens.

Use the teens as much as possible and help them feel like authorities whenever possible and appropriate. Always, ask the teens to share their experiences and thoughts on the subject. Help them recognize the relevance of the material to their lives by allowing them to be a part of the process. This could mean allowing participants to facilitate the group or develop the weekly agenda or create committees to organize the activities or trips. Help the group to feel as if this is their club and they are responsible and accountable for what happens in it. Let them know right away what is expected of them and what they should expect from you. Help create an atmosphere of trust and responsibility.

To help teens take ownership of the club, advisors may consider creating a contract with the teens that all participants sign off on, promising to:

- ☐ Be Punctual
- ☐ Have a Positive Attitude
- ☐ Act & Speak Appropriately
- ☐ Be Prepared
- ☐ Be Honest
- ☐ Be Cooperative
- ☐ Attend and Participate In Meetings and Events

This curriculum is a tool to make your job easier. It should allow you to be more creative and spend more time with the teens instead of thinking of activities and agendas. Use it to strengthen your *Teens Take the City* meetings and make them an interesting, fun place to be.

Most importantly, all learning does not need to (should not) happen in a classroom setting. Find ways to bring lessons to life through hands on experiences. For example: visiting various communities to explore similarities and differences in areas of education, youth services, environment, etc.; interviewing community members; attending city wide events; participating in community outreach and service.

Validate every response and action. This could include phrases like:

- ☐ “That is a great point because...”
- ☐ “Your example is an important one in that...”
- ☐ “I understand exactly what you are saying (or how you felt).”
- ☐ “That is really interesting.”
- ☐ “Wow, you must have felt awful.”

Say something to indicate to them that their participation matters and their voices and opinions mean something. Void the word “wrong”.

Encouragement is important. Another way to encourage the teens to remember and use the information and experiences is to use the lessons, vocabulary, ideas, and techniques learned in a particular session throughout the entire program year. This could be as simple as summarizing what happened the previous week at the beginning of every session. Repeating things not only makes it more memorable, it also emphasizes the significance of the information.

Teens Take the City Curriculum Table of Contents

I Love NY

Community mapping & Learning NYC

Interviewing community members to learn neighborhood challenges

Finding an issue of importance and finding a point of view

Learning NYC government

Community Activity (Part 1)

Researching solutions to the issue

Developing a proposed solution to the issue for the City to consider

- Mid-Program Event
- Teen Mayor and Borough President Elections
- City Hall Event

Making the Change