

AMPLIFY-NY's YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUMS (YLF)

Amplifying the Next Generation of Disability Rights Leaders



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Overall



How many people do you expect to attend this Forum and are people grouped together?

Each YLF is designed to allow 30 young people to participate. Participants range in age from 14 to 24. In order to provide overnight accommodations, we room youth together based on numerous factors which can include, but is not limited to age, gender, a prior relationship existing between two applicants, the city/town from which they are traveling from, and similar interests/experiences. If rooming with another individual is not preferable due to medical necessity or a disability accommodation, please indicate on the application and follow up with AMPLIFY-NY Leadership.

What will the supervision situation be and who provides it?

YOUTH POWER! (YP!) has over 10 years of experience hosting and leading youth leadership and empowerment conferences and activities. YP! has dedicated staff who will be providing supervision over all our structured daytime and evening activities. YP will also recruit volunteer coaches to serve as small group leaders to reach our goal ratio of 1 staff/coach to 3 youth participants. We provide training to volunteers/coaches which covers their roles and responsibilities, encouraging participation, disability etiquette, active listening, conflict resolution and crisis de-escalation. Additionally, we make every effort possible to stagger youth hotel rooms with staff/coach rooms as well as recruit someone to provide overnight security when necessary based on location.

Will Forum activities be held in one place, or will participants need to arrange any transportation?

All activities taking place during a YLF will be held at the event venue in meeting rooms unless there is a group outing (unique to your region) in which YP! staff will be organizing transportation. The only transportation a participant needs to arrange is coming to the event, and leaving from the event.

Will participants need to bring and/or be responsible for money for things like food, transportation and recreation?

The YLF provides overnight accommodations, meals, any transportation taking place during the event, and optional evening activities for those who participate. It is not necessary for participants to bring money unless they may want to purchase snacks, drinks, or souvenirs from an onsite restaurant or store. YP! Leadership will send an email to selected participants prior to each event regarding suggested items to bring, which may include but is not limited to: appropriate attire for a leadership luncheon and during activities, swimwear (if selected as an evening activity), pillows/blankets, stuffed animals or pictures to provide comfort while away from home, comfortable footwear, favorite snacks etc.

Are there any accommodations in place for folks with sensory concerns or may need a space to go if they begin to feel overwhelmed?

YP! makes every effort to ensure that our sessions at the YLF are not only culturally competent, but also universally accessible and inclusive of all participants. Additional accommodations are made based on who will be in attendance at the forum. We ask selected participants to complete a detailed medical/accommodations form in order to understand the needs of each unique individual attending as well as work with the hotel/event site to ensure we are able to provide all necessary accommodations. This includes extra meeting rooms for small group sessions which can be utilized

when a need arises for individuals to step away. Participants will be grouped with 6 youth and 2 coaches, which allows for one coach to step away with a participant while the other continues the group if necessary. Additionally, we will have staff that won't be confined to small groups to assist and provide additional support should a participant need to be in a separate private room.

What kind of procedure do you have for dealing with 'personality conflicts' between participants?

The majority of activities during a YLF take place in small groups (6 youth with 2 coaches). We set an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusiveness at the beginning of our events, and each group develops their own guidelines to adhere to and shares what they need to feel safe and included in the event. If 'personality conflicts' arise, we work to resolve the issue on an individualized basis. All staff/volunteers are trained to address these types of situations as they arise. If the conflict is too distracting however, we reserve the right to separate individuals by changing small groups, or take further action up to and including expulsion from the event at the participant's expense if incidents continue to arise.

What supervision, prompting and support is available for medication management, personal care or other health-related needs?

As per our code of conduct, participants who take medication agree to take responsibility in bringing them and any needed supplies to the event and ensure to take them responsibly. We encourage youth to work with their parent/caregiver to develop a detailed list of medications and times to take them if necessary and include with your medical/disability accommodations form. YP! staff are not responsible for ensuring medications are being taken, however we will have a nurse available during the forum to assist participants in doing so. YP! staff and coaches can assist in reminding participants regarding additional needs if asked by the participant. Personal care attendants can also be requested if needed.

Is there any protocol in place if a participant wants/needs to leave the forum?

If something arises during the forum, YP! staff takes the time to discuss the situation, feelings, and any steps we can take to alleviate any concerns to encourage further participation prior to taking steps to contact necessary individuals to arrange the participants departure.

YP! seeks individuals who are able to attend and participate fully (arrive on time, stay during sessions, and on event premises) in the entire event to the best of their ability. Being peers ourselves, we understand needing breaks and that things arise and work with youth on individual basis. If someone is unsure of whether they believe they can participate in the forum, we encourage you to discuss it with your parent/caregiver, peer worker or advocate, or YP! staff prior to applying/confirming your acceptance and develop a plan for supporting your attendance.

Is there positive messaging about families?

Of course! While leadership, advocacy and independence are common themes throughout the forum, many of us have not gotten to where we are today without the support of our families! We define families broadly - including extended family, blended families, and kinship care - and make points to explain throughout the forum that none of us are ever truly 100% independent, but we are interdependent. Families play a very important role in the lives of youth/young adults to take steps towards achieving their goals. We also have created a separate workshop series to assist parents/caregivers of youth with disabilities in gaining the tools to help set the stage for youth to step into leadership roles and work toward what they define as independence.

If someone has a disability that may impact their ability to read, reason, communicate, or regulate their behavior are they welcome to participate?

Yes! This event aims to amplify the next generation of disability rights leaders and we welcome all individuals who meet our selection criteria to apply for our YLFs. In order to be selected, a complete application (completed by the participant in their own words with or without the support of another individual) must be received from an individual who has a developmental or other disability, is between ages 14 and 24, lives in New York State and can demonstrate their leadership potential/desire in their application. We are able to provide reasonable accommodations for those who may need assistance reading, understanding material, communicating, getting around, or related to their behavior.

If an applicant is not selected to participate, how is this communicated and how is the applicant encouraged to continue their self-development journey? Are any resources provided to support them in this effort?

Applications received are reviewed by YP!'s peer-run Special Events Planning Group. Special Events will ensure the group selected represents the diversity of disabilities, gender identities, and ethnicities in each region to the best of their ability. If an applicant is not selected to participate, they will receive notice by email and/or their preferred method identified with suggestions of ways grow as a leader and gain experience through YP! and other regional groups.

Daytime Activities:

Will there be a set schedule for participants to follow? Will they need to make choices about which sessions to attend in order to create this schedule?

Each Youth Leadership Forum follows a structured schedule for the course of the four day event. All sessions are decided prior to the YLF based on the National Association of Youth Leadership Forum's standards and modeled after California's YLF Curriculum, but altered for New York State and each distinctive region. The AMPLIFY-NY Planning Group decides what guest speakers and leaders will be invited to participate, as well as help choose appropriate evening activities which are optional for you to participate in. No choices will need to be made by participants regarding the schedule.

Will activities be done in smaller groups? What will the size of those groups be?

Yes. The majority of our activities and sessions take place in small groups. These small groups consist of 6 young people with 2 small group leaders/coaches that facilitate the sessions.

Will group activities be interactive? Will there be group facilitators to encourage participation and help with the flow of conversation?

YLF activities and sessions take place in either small groups (6 youth to 2 leaders/coaches) or large group (all participants together). All small group leaders/coaches are provided with training, tips, and tools to help encourage participation and ensure that all members of their group are involved to the best of the young person's ability. Additionally, during large group sessions, speakers/presenters are chosen by the AMPLIFY-NY Planning Group (youth that have, will, or fit our target demographic) with the facilitator's interaction/engagement in mind, so that sessions are hands on, interactive, and/or engaging.

Are there "helpers" who understand how to approach someone with an intellectual or developmental disability to see if they understand what is being said or done?

Presenters, speakers, small group coaches, and panelist responsible for the majority of the event are individuals who have a disability and/or cross/systems experience themselves and speak from a place of lived experience. They are knowledgeable of the audience and their needs and are instructed to engage the audience through various forms of learning (visual, audio, hands on, etc.) as

well as take time to ensure participants have the availability to ask questions. After larger sessions, participants have the opportunity again to review and seek clarity in their small groups. Support persons and personal care assistants, or requesting review sessions can also be requested of those who may share this concern.

Will participants be allowed to opt-out of daytime activities? If so, what options/supervision would be available? Would they just be alone in their rooms?

All activities and sessions are required with the exception of the optional evening activities which typically begin after 8:00 pm. As part of our code of conduct, all participants agree to participate fully in the entire event *to the best of their ability*. We have built numerous breaks into our schedule and we include fidget items for those who need as well as space for pacing. However, if someone has a need to be excused or otherwise absent from a daytime activity, they must communicate that with the event leads and the situation will be assessed on an individual basis for their needs and ensuring they are supported.

With respect to Food and Lodging:

Are evening activities supervised and if so, how? Is staying with the group required? Every night of the YLF, there is an evening activity (chosen by the peer-led Planning Group) in which youth can choose to participate in, but are not required. Staff and small group coaches provide the supervision and typically lead the evening activities which may include game nights, swimming in a pool (lifeguard on duty), a movie screening, an art activity, etc. Those who do not wish to participate in the scheduled activity will have the option of hanging out in the hotel lobby with others (as they may wish to just talk, watch videos, play magic or Pokemon, etc) with supervision, or return to their rooms for the night.

How many young people will be assigned to share a room?

As the majority of these events will be taking place in a hotel setting, we will be assigning two young people per hotel room as best as we can. Some participants may require accommodations which will place them alone in a room or perhaps with a personal care attendant (such as needing an accessible room, or having specific toileting, hygiene or medical support needs), however we room participants as best as we can with peers close in age with similar interests, close in location within the region, and by their gender identity. Additionally, we ask on our application if a participant knows of another individual who is applying who they will feel comfortable rooming with and try to honor these request to the best of our ability.

What precautions are taken to ensure safety of the participants overnight?

The safety and wellbeing of our participants is of utmost concern to us. Every participant is required to read and sign a code of conduct which outlines the rules/guidelines when traveling to, during, and leaving from our event. We screen (national sex offender registry) and provide training to all volunteers of our event to ensure that they are culturally competent and knowledgeable of disability etiquette and our approaches to our events. We also ask for our venues to stagger our staff/volunteer rooms between our participants to deter any inappropriate behaviors in their rooms as well as recruit an individual to provide 'security' for us during the night (posted in the hallway/ general area for those who can't sleep or need support). All participants are made aware of the staff contact information and room numbers in the event of an emergency.

Will meals be eaten as a group? What about special dietary needs?

After the first day (which begins with 11:00 am registration), our days begin at 8:00 am for breakfast, with our first session beginning at 9:30 am. Additionally, all meals will be eaten together and at specific times as shown in our schedule at a glance. To see our schedule at a glance, please refer to

our website (**please note: this is a basic schedule and is subject to change; detailed, region specific schedule will be shared when finalized**). For those with special dietary needs, it is incredibly important for you to not only share this information on your application and secondary paperwork (if accepted), but also do so in a timely manner so that we can ensure meals that suit your needs (**please note: we are able to accommodate special diets and allergies, not preferences**).

Will everyone be responsible for getting themselves up and ready for the day?

Yes. We encourage youth to utilize self-advocacy skills and ask their roommate to assist with waking them up in the morning if needed, or scheduling a wakeup call with the front desk. Staff/small group coaches will also take notice if individuals have not been seen by the close of breakfast to ensure everyone is ready to participate to the best of their ability that day.

Are parents allowed to be at or near the hotel to be available should help/assistance be needed? Per the National Association of Youth Leadership Forums, parents/caregivers are **not** allowed to participate in youth specific activities during the YLF as, in our experience, it doesn't allow a participant to experience the entirety of the event as intended (step towards independent living, empowerment, rooming with a peer, self-advocacy etc.).

However, there is an accompanying workshop series titled 'Foundations for Leadership' which is **FREE** and offered on the first and last days of the YLF (at the same location) in which parents/caregivers are invited and encouraged to participate. Parents/Caregivers who are interested and choose to participate in the workshop series have lunch along with an overview of the YLF orientation with all the other parents/caregivers and youth. After lunch and orientation, parents/caregivers will have a chance to come together separately from the youth in a learning and sharing offering guided by parents who also have child/children with a disability. Foundations for Leadership was developed to have an opportunity for parents/caregivers to gather support, learn, and share experiences on how best to support their youth as they grow and develop as self-advocates and step into leadership roles in their community.

This would be the most appropriate venue for parents/caregivers to be in close proximity to their young person. If a parent/caregiver decided to purchase a hotel room at the venue, we ask that you would respect our intent and purpose for the event, and keep interactions with your child to a minimum for their sake.

WHAT IS THE YLF?

The YLF, or Youth Leadership Forum, is an innovative, four-day training program for individuals with developmental and other disabilities ages 14-24. It includes career awareness and leadership development information to assist young people with disabilities in reaching their full potential. The training is presented in a fun, entertaining, and educational format with the support of peers/coaches along the way.

Attached to the YLF is Foundations for Leadership: A Parent/Caregiver Workshop Series. This workshop series brings together the family and youth perspectives and takes place on the first and last days of YLFs. It provides caregivers of individuals with developmental and other disabilities the tools they need to support the young people in their care as a vital part of their transition team by focusing on teaching, modeling, and support. Additional workshops take place in the community following a YLF.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE YLF?

Young people between the ages of 14 and 24 are eligible to participate. In order to be selected, individuals must share about their leadership potential, community involvement, and the ability to interact effectively with others in their application.

Caregivers of youth with developmental or other disabilities, especially those of selected youth participants, are encouraged to participate in the Foundations for Leadership workshop series. Additionally, caregivers who have experience with self-advocacy, NYS systems and resources, involvement in systems change, and a commitment to self-advocacy and self-determination for youth have the opportunity to serve as trainers.

WHAT SPECIFICALLY HAPPENS AT THE YLF?

- **We bring together young people with disabilities who demonstrate potential leadership qualities and share information with each other.** The program includes small and large group discussions, evening activities, a formal leader's dinner with community/state leaders, a graduation ceremony, and continued supported leadership activities.
- **Parents and caregivers participate in the Foundations for Leadership Workshop Series** on the first and last days of the YLF with a few joint opening and closing activities.
- **We provide education and activities which touch on topics such as** disability history, rights, culture, pride, etiquette, and self-awareness, self-determination, self, peer and systems advocacy, leadership and communication skills, financial literacy, adaptive sports, networking and public speaking, resources, assistive technology and accommodations.
- **Presenters who meet with the participants may include disability community leaders,** legislators, celebrities and numerous other professional role models who have disabilities.
- **Participants identify existing barriers to personal and professional success** and develop plans to deal with those barriers.
- **Participants have the opportunity to meet with state leaders at our Leaders' Dinner** and speak candidly about real life issues youth face while in state systems or accessing services. It is intimidating for young people to speak frankly with government leaders and this dinner gives youth the chance to communicate in a relaxed setting
- **Coaches assist each youth/young adult in developing a "Personal Leadership Plan"** which includes specific action items for when they return to their communities.
- **Youth are connected with their Regional Youth Partner and an advisor** to assist them with their leadership project after the YLF.

WHY HAVE YLFS?

Young people with disabilities have both more opportunities and more challenges than at any other time in our nation's history. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has created unprecedented opportunities for these young people to fully develop as positive, contributing members of our society. However, many need encouragement to develop as leaders in their communities. The title of this project, "AMPLIFY-NY," was created to reflect the importance of giving young people opportunity to speak-up so that they can value their own voices and can be heard. Through our forums, we will amplify the voices of young people and the opportunities they have to take on leadership roles. YLFs also enable them to learn from each other and from successful adults with disabilities who are recognized leaders and role models. YLFs benefit not only the participants, but all young people with disabilities, our communities in general, and the adults who assist in producing the forum.

HOW DOES THE FORUM HAPPEN?

Leading the way in planning these forums is a peer-run statewide planning group. Youth and young adults with developmental and other disabilities ages 14-24 are invited to join this group to help design and carry out YLFs across the state. Approximately 10 young will be selected to attend through a competitive process. The event successfully integrates participants who represent the ethnic diversity of our state.

YLFs take place across the 5 Office for People with Developmental Disability (OPWDD) regions of New York State at different times during the year depending on the region. Please refer to our YLFs per year document on our website for more information.

WILL THERE BE MORE FORUMS IN THE FUTURE?

The first-ever Forum was held in 1992 in California and subsequent Forums have been held every summer since then. California developed a curriculum that allowed other states replicate this unique project and many states and territories currently have Forums. YOUTH POWER! has been funded by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) to replicate the model here in New York and to roll it out regionally across the state with parallel parent/caregiver workshops through the year 2021. YOUTH POWER! is developing a Sustainability Task Force to sustain this initiative past our current funding.

YOUTH POWER! has considerable experience in implementing these activities as their first YLF was held in 2008. Since 1992, hundreds of participants across the United States have graduated through this program and thousands of adults have been positively affected by participating as YLF volunteers.

HOW MUCH DOES THE FORUM COST?

Participants are not charged to attend the Forum. Our cost is approximately \$1000 per participant, not including thousands of dollars for services and goods provided in-kind by volunteer supporters. The majority of costs are covered by grant funding, however we also seek private and corporate donations. Major partners include the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Families Together in New York State, Parent Network of Western NY, INCLUDEnyc, and Cornell University.

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