Empowering Teen Voices—an Overview of Teen Council

Welcome to your Teen Council manual! This publication has been a labor of love by the community educators at Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest (PPGNW). Peer education is the highlight of our jobs, and our work with Teen Council is inspiring, motivating, and fun. Teen Council is a core program in our education department and represents work we are truly passionate about. Facilitating Teen Council is never easy, but it is always rewarding. Truth be told, it is one of the most labor-intensive programs that we support. When the knowledge and skills of well-trained peer educators are marshaled, it yields exponential opportunities for education and outreach. And, there is nothing like sitting in the back of a classroom and watching those peer educators you so arduously trained captivate the attention of their peers in a way you know you never could.

This manual is complete, easy to use, and full of resources. Inside you will find ideas, tips, and answers to frequently asked questions. If you are starting your first Teen Council program, this manual, together with start-up instructions and resources, will provide you with the necessary tools to move forward. If you are already running a peer education program and you want to start a Teen Council, this manual offers information on best practices, which you can incorporate into your program.

A unique part of the manual is “A Word from Lindy.” Lindy Blodgett was a Teen Council member in one of our groups; shortly after she completed the program, we invited her to write about her experiences as a participant. Her insights, which share a view from inside the program, are found in each section. We feel that the voice of an actual participant provides a richness to this professional manual.

Because Teen Council was created at Planned Parenthood, the manual refers to its other entities, such as Health Centers and Public Policy. Please note that Teen Council can be used in youth service organizations that don’t have these functions.

Best of luck with your Teen Council; we hope you enjoy your experience! Feel free to contact us with any questions or comments.

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Empowering Teen Voices
A Start to Finish Manual to Implement Teen Council

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To the PPGNW Board of Directors for their unwavering support for the role that Education plays in delivering the Planned Parenthood mission, and to the numerous staff members who have championed this program from their places in the organization or have made other contributions to the final product. And, finally, a huge thanks to President and CEO Chris Charbonneau, who believes in the power of young people and who listens to their voices.

Dedication
This manual is dedicated to the many young people who have been Teen Council members since 1990. Your passionate commitment to ensuring that your peers have the information and resources they need to make healthy decisions has motivated us to create this manual. You are our heroes.

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Introduction

In this section you will find

• an overview of the Teen Council program
• our philosophy and the model for Teen Council
• suggestions on how to use this manual
• a sample budget for Teen Council
• insights on the value of peer education
• a word from Lindy

I. Our Mission

The mission of Teen Council is to empower teenagers to educate their peers, families, and communities about human sexuality and healthy decision making and inspire teens to use their voices to advocate for just and humane sexual attitudes and policies.

Teen Council Vision

Through the power of peer education that uses accurate, unbiased sexuality education, we will end ignorance, promote tolerance, and improve the communication between teens and the important people in their lives.
II. Using This Manual

New to Peer Education or Starting a New Teen Council?

I’m new to Peer Education

If you are new to peer education or are starting a new Teen Council group, we suggest you read this manual thoroughly. The introduction provides a clear picture of what to consider before beginning and the remaining sections give step-by-step instructions on how to create, facilitate, and support a successful peer education program. In addition, there are lesson plans for training Teen Council members and for helping them create presentations for schools. Both this manual (Notebooks I and II) and the accompanying CD-ROM include all the documents you will need.

What Is Teen Council?

Teen Council...
...teaches peers about sexuality, in classrooms and one-on-one
...impacts peers through thoughtful, nonjudgmental education and outreach
...is a group of 10–18 high school-age peer educators
...begins in August and goes through June of the following year
...gets started with a three-day retreat
...meets weekly for two-hour training meetings
...keeps your organization up-to-date about teen culture
...celebrates holidays, birthdays, and program accomplishments

I am Already Running a Peer Education Group

If you have an established peer education group and want to strengthen or add to your program, consider
reviewing the frequently asked questions (FAQs) found at the end of each section. You can also review the first page of each section for specific content. In addition, lesson plans and activities are included in Notebook II: Curriculum and Resources.

**Manual Contents and Layout**

There are two parts to this complete program manual: The **Program Guide** and the **Curriculum and Resources**. Each of these is in a separate notebook as part of a two notebook set. Please note that the page numbers are continuous between the two notebooks.

You will notice reference to resource documents throughout the manual. These are the forms, letters and other documents that support the program and that can be customized to meet your needs. They are identified with an R followed by numbers (eg: R1.2). The R indicates that it is a resource, the 1st number after the R indicates in which section it is found and the 2nd number indicates where it fits chronologically at the end of that section. In this instance, document R1.2 can be found at the end of Section 1, the second Resource document.

Notebook I – The **Program Guide** contains Sections 1-6:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Recruitment and Selection
- Section 3: Training
- Section 4: Presentations
- Section 5: Support and Recognition
- Section 6: Resources

“What it ultimately comes down to is understanding, when you’re put in a position or situation, how to make the decision that’s best for you. When Teen Council members come in and draw their peers into a process about making decisions, students start to see that there is no “right” answer, just one that is best for them. As a classroom teacher, I can’t engage them in the same way on my own.”

– 9th grade teacher
Notebook II – Curriculum contains Sections 7:

Section 7: Lesson Plans and Activities

The Resources section contains any documents that are not linked to a specific section of the notebook as well as documents for the Teen Council Resource Notebook, a notebook given to each Teen Council member.

On the first page of each section is a list of what you will find in that section. Each section in the Program Guide has some consistent features, including A Word from Lindy, Essential Elements and Best Practices, and FAQs.

Program History

In 1988, one of the community educators at Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest (PPGNW) created a regular gathering of local teens for the purpose of informing her about current teen issues. Following suit, two other educators started similar groups. The educators discovered that the teens helped them keep up with teen culture. They also offered insight into how to best deliver sexuality education messages. The teens started co-presenting this information in the classroom, and thus the Teen Council was born.

Currently, at least half of the sexuality education presentations we do at PPGNW include members from our Teen Councils. The groups are created, planned for, trained, and facilitated by PPGNW educators in seven counties in the region. Educators work independently with their groups and meet regularly with other Teen Council facilitators to share ideas and plans. Although the groups are not identical, they are very similar. After nearly two decades and a lot of input from committed teens and creative educators, we know that the basic structure of our program is highly successful at delivering comprehensive sex education.

“Partnering with teens helps our entire sexuality education program stay relevant.”
– Facilitator
Program Philosophy

The Teen Council program is an educational model that trains teen members to present sexuality information to their peers and other members of their communities. It is not designed to be a support or counseling group. That is not to say that members don’t receive a lot of support from facilitators and each other—like all adolescents, those participating in Teen Councils experience difficulties from time to time, which they may bring to the group or the facilitators because of the special bond they develop working together.

When selecting Teen Council members, it is important to choose those who are most likely to be successful peer educators. Be sure to select applicants who can attend meetings regularly, can academically afford to miss school for presentations, and can focus on learning the skills required to be an effective educator and leader. We place a high priority on engaging teens who represent the ethnic, social, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of the community in which they will be interacting. A list of qualities of successful Teen Council members created by members themselves can be found in the sidebar on page 28.

Does Peer Education Work?

Included in the Resources section of this manual is a summary of a literature review (R6.3) that was done in 2012 on peer education; it covers what works and what doesn’t. Unfortunately, there hasn’t been a lot of evaluation on peer education programs, so there is little conclusive evidence on their effectiveness. However, our own evaluations have shown that Teen Council members, students, teachers, and parents find the Teen Council programs extremely useful. Additionally, the Teen Council model is being evaluated by a nationally-recognized research team that specializes in the

Developmental Assets

The Teen Council model strongly supports many of the assets outlined in the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents model (2006). For further information and analysis about Teen Council’s relationship to developmental assets, risk, and protective factors, see R6.5. Teen Council and the Developmental Assets. This document may be particularly useful when writing grants or working to gain board- and/or community support.
Core Components
Contributing to the strength and sustainability of the program are the core components:

- High Warmth
- High Expectations
- High Structure

What Makes a Teen Council Successful?

This manual offers a peer education model that mitigates common pitfalls of other peer education programs described in an article published in *The Journal of Adolescence* entitled Common Reasons Why Peer Education Fails (Walker S.A. and Avis M. 1999, vol 22. Issue 4, pgs 573-577)

Contributing to the strength and sustainability of Teen Councils is the paradigm of **High Warmth, High Expectation, High Structure**. Although curriculum is important, these components are the critical ingredients that make a successful program and need to be a part of every Teen Council. We have found that activities and actions that reflect these three core components are at the root of programmatic success.

**High Warmth** is reflected in the way that the facilitator is emotionally connected with the teens. The facilitator has fostered unity among members as well as between herself and the group, and there is a culture of safety and trust.

The **High Expectations** for commitment to the group and to Planned Parenthood are made clear from the beginning; members agree to fully participate in all meetings, trainings, and community education and outreach.

**High Structure** is reflected in the degree of consistency in every part of the program—meeting structure, training design, and member support and development.

“Teen Council is a beautiful experience. The facilitator helps create a warm, safe environment that encourages self-exploration and education in innovative ways.”

- Teen Council member
In short, the Teen Council program is highly structured and focused so that teens know what to expect and that they can count on the facilitators to use their time wisely. High expectations are placed on them and on the facilitators, who help create a warm and caring environment in which to carry out the work together.

Following are some specific examples of each of these key components. Please note that every part of the Teen Council program has been created with at least one of these in mind, so care must be taken when making changes or adaptations.

**Indicators of High Warmth**
- Meeting space is comfortable, softly lit, and teen friendly
- Food is available at all meetings
- Facilitator contacts members who miss a meeting or a presentation
- Birthdays and special accomplishments are celebrated

**Essential Elements**
The core components of High Warmth, High Structure and High Expectation are supported through the Essential Elements (EE) of the program. There are EEs for each section of this Program Guide and are the markers for program fidelity; each EE is important for programmatic success. In addition, Best Practices (BP) are included as examples of how to achieve the EEs. Find the EE/BP on the following pages:

- Recruitment and Selection: pages 46-47
- Training: pages 106-109
- Presentations: page 172
- Support and Recognition: page 211
“Being on Teen Council allowed me to follow some interests I hadn’t even realized I had and to do something real and meaningful during a time in my life when I was often told ‘Not yet, soon you’ll be an adult and then you can do something real, but not yet.’ Because of Teen Council I am a better student, a better teacher, a better person.”
—Teen Council alum

“You’ll find more information about what Teen Council members are doing in the classroom in the Presentations section.

The core concepts of High Warmth, High Structure, High Expectation creates a strong container that both feels good and supports a high functioning group.”
—Facilitator

We can’t say enough about how important the facilitator is to the success of the program. It takes several years to become really skilled at running a peer education program, so the facilitators must be very dedicated to this work. While it may be tempting to enlist a volunteer or intern to run the program, peer education literature suggests that having consistent, skilled facilitators who become mentors to the teens are necessary for program success. Although

- Facilitator is nonjudgmental and viewed as an approachable and supportive adult
- Teambuilding and bonding are integrated into meetings
- Members have close, supportive relationships and every member feels connected to the group

**Indicators of High Expectation**
- Group agreements are clearly posted and adhered to
- Members participate in community presentations and events
- Members’ participation hours are tracked and shared
- Members participate in a midyear meeting with the facilitator
- Members are selected via application and interview processes
- Attendance and participation expectations are clearly articulated and understood

**Indicators of High Structure**
- Meetings have clear agendas
- Meetings have recurring structure
- Formal lesson plans are always created for training members
- Observation and feedback systems are in place for peer educators’ presentations
- Peer educators have clear ways to use their educational skills in the community
volunteers and interns are a helpful complement to paid staff and often provide beneficial programmatic support, it is imprudent to rely on them to run your program alone.

**What Do Teen Council Members Do?**

Teen Council members are educators and representatives of Planned Parenthood. They are trained to do classroom presentations on a variety of sexuality topics, as well as to co-facilitate workshops for parents and families offered by Planned Parenthood. They provide valuable, accurate information and support to their immediate peers, family members, and members of their communities through one-on-one dialogue.

In their training Teen Council members learn about a wide range of sexuality topics, with emphasis on the importance of using medically accurate information. They also learn how to answer any questions their peers may ask. They engage in activities that help them to sort out their own feelings and values, in addition to learning how to communicate effectively with others, particularly when their opinions differ. They also investigate how people learn and a wide variety of teaching strategies. More information about what Teen Council members do in the classroom can be found in the *Presentations* section.

Although their primary task is to provide classroom education, Teen Council members are also peripherally involved in marketing, fundraising, and public policy. For example, they make presentations to PPGNW’s board of directors and primary fundraisers to educate them about the program. Additionally, all Teen Council members are invited to participate in an annual Lobby Day event that is carried out in collaboration with PPGNW’s Public Policy Department. Members receive training about current issues that affect PPGNW, as well as

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**Qualities of a Really Great Teen Council Facilitator (Brainstormed by Teen Council Members)**

- friendly
- informative
- caring
- personable
- fun
- engaging
- understanding
- kind
- knowledgeable
- loving
- smart
- available
- likes teens
- committed
- good listener
- takes risks
- can control/focus the group
- high expectations of group
- doesn’t have favorites
- passionate
- empathetic
- fair
- informed
- organized
- honors commitments
- open-minded
- respectful
- down-to-earth
- genuine
- outgoing
- confronts problems
- educated
- patient
- creates unique learning activities
- easy to talk to
Give It Time

Our peer education program has evolved over many years and we have learned a great deal by trial and error—you will too. Don’t expect complete success immediately! Our newest programs have had the advantage of years of institutional memory on how to implement activities and gain access to communities. It can take awhile for a community (school personnel, youth, parents, and other support agencies) to learn about your peer education program, observe it in action, and see its impact. School personnel in particular may be cautious in the beginning. Give it some time. We have found that our programs, even in the most conservative communities, become more recognized and accepted each year they exist.

as how to lobby their legislators. PPGNW’s lobbyist often asks particularly articulate members to testify before legislative committees about bills that pertain to youth. Their voices have been powerful instruments of change among our state legislators.

How Does Teen Council Benefit the Entire Organization?

Teen Council members provide countless benefits to our entire organization – not just the Education Department. They have impacted every department in the organization in one way or another.

Among other things, Teen Council members

• provide thousands of their peers with accurate, nonjudgmental information each year
• increase access to schools
• provide support by advocating for the organization in public venues
• provide valuable insights regarding what adolescents need and want in both clinical and educational settings
• create community awareness for the entire agency by enthusiastically supporting and advocating for the mission
• market Health Center services to their peers and families
• appeal to donors who are strongly attracted to prevention programs.
What Is a Typical Budget for Teen Council?

Teen Council is a program that takes a great deal of staff time, which is the largest expense. Each group needs a dedicated staff member who will spend 30 percent of his time on this project. Other expenses will be much lower in comparison. The budget for a Teen Council program, in addition to the start up costs and ongoing support from the Peer Education Institute© (PEI), should include the following items.

Estimates for a Teen Council of 12-18 members

- Facilitator’s salary (.3 FTE)
- Retreat—$2,500 (3 day, 2 night retreat)
- T-shirts - $300 (available from the PEI)
- Food—$1,500
- Office supplies—$200
- Art and activity supplies—$300
- Teen Council Resource Notebooks—$300
- Reference materials—$200
- Postage—$50
- Printing—$300
- TOTAL (not including staff and PEI costs)—$5,650

Other budget considerations

- travel (this will vary depending on the size of your catchment area)
- space rental (this may be necessary if you don’t have a suitable weekly meeting location)
- utilities
How Is Teen Council Funded?

Teen Council is funded primarily through grants and support from PPGNW. Many people at PPGNW, starting with our president/CEO, have had the opportunity to interact with Teen Council members and recognize the power of the program. Teen Council also tends to be an exciting program to funders and we anticipate that our current evaluation research will make it even more attractive to them.

In 2004, we began evaluating the effectiveness of the Teen Council program using a pre- and post-program assessment tool. In 2011, we began a three-year, in-depth, comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the Teen Council program on its members, their peers, schools, parents, and communities. We look forward to sharing these results in the future.

Sample Yearly Schedule for Teen Council

July

☐ Plan Teen Council retreat
☐ Send a summer letter to members
☐ Make Teen Council Resource Notebooks
☐ Plan weekly trainings for the year

August

☐ Send a letter about the retreat to parents and members
☐ Have members pick up their Teen Council Resource Notebooks
☐ Plan last-minute retreat details
☐ Conduct retreat
**September**

- Begin weekly Teen Council trainings
- Send marketing letters to schools describing the Teen Council and what kinds of presentations they can provide
- Begin scheduling presentations
- Hold parent orientation meeting

**October**

- Include an activity in a weekly meeting where teens practice answering anonymous questions
- Create a calendar of events and encourage teens to attend (e.g., AIDS walk, National Teen Pregnancy Prevention month, Day of Silence)
- Prepare a letter for members to give to teachers about the program

**November**

- Spend one meeting reviewing basic information
- Spend one meeting practicing classroom presentations
- Members begin presenting

**December**

- Host a party for members before winter break

**January**

- Conduct individual midyear meeting
- Reserve site for the summer retreat
Notes:

February

☐ Spend one meeting reviewing basic information

March

☐ Put together recruitment packets for schools and community organizations

April

☐ Deliver recruitment packets

☐ Train Teen Council on process for selecting new members

May

☐ Interview and select new Teen Council members

☐ Plan the final meeting of the year

☐ Buy or make small gifts for departing seniors

☐ Send invitations for family and friends potluck

June

☐ Host family and friends potluck

☐ Plan and conduct final Teen Council meeting

☐ Send letters of acceptance and regret to applicants and their families

☐ Conduct first Teen Council meeting for next year’s group
III. Lindy’s Introduction

I am Lindy Blodgett. I was a Teen Council member from my sophomore through my senior years of high school.

After graduating, I deepened my commitment to sexual and reproductive health and freedom, and have had opportunities to expand my understanding of the issues involved in this work. I have worked part-time and full-time at a Planned Parenthood health center. As a college student, I worked with another Teen Council alum to start a campus Voices for Planned Parenthood (VOX) chapter. I had the opportunity to spend a summer in Washington, DC interning with Planned Parenthood International, where I focused on building support for family planning through international partnerships.

Through my work with Planned Parenthood, I have developed a strong belief in the importance of people’s right to reproductive and sexual self-determination. I also hold a commitment to community education and the importance of dialogue. I don’t often forget that my current worldview is largely tied to my experience on Teen Council.

I am excited to share my thoughts about the Teen Council model in this manual.

“I don’t often forget that my current worldview is largely tied to my experience on Teen Council.”