



Oregon Youth Caucus

The Voice of Oregon's Students

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The politics of tomorrow will begin with the new leaders of today.

*Welcome to **The Youth Caucus** ... igniting leaders for the future of Oregon.*

Program Summary: The **Youth Caucus** is a group of high school students who represent the political voice of youth in Oregon and present their peers with a variety of opportunities for political empowerment, expression, and real-world leadership experience. By engaging students in the political process and advocating for issues that students care about, the Youth Caucus assures students that age need not limit their ability to make their voice heard or participate in their democracy.

I. The World Needs Youth

A. Politics can be cool!

It is possible to engage youth in democracy. After the 2004 election, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) reported 4.6 million more young people cast votes than in 2000, representing the highest youth turnout in more than a decade. As a general matter, however, youth voter turnout has been on the decline since 1972. **The Youth Caucus** works to improve youth engagement in the political process by giving students opportunities for inclusion even if they are ineligible to vote. The Youth Caucus believes that by engaging students *now*, they will later become more informed voters and more politically active members of society.

B. Students Need a Voice Too

High school students have no lobby. Students across the state are affected everyday by the decisions of adult voters, yet the more than 500,000 students in Oregon high schools have no organization to represent the voice of students. Many students pay taxes and participate in their communities, yet they have no formal mechanism for communicating their interests when it comes to decisions which change their lives.

C. The Real World

Currently, there are few real civic leadership development opportunities for high school students. From Mock Trial to Model UN, students are offered many opportunities to build necessary skills, but are rarely invited to participate in the *real thing*. **The Youth Caucus** offers high school students a real opportunity to see how their democracy works, take part in the political process, and meet the people who make policy decisions on their behalf.

D. Leadership, Do You Have It?

Colleges are becoming ever more competitive and students are constantly looking for new ways not only to build their resumes, but to make sure they will be prepared to take on the challenges they will face at the next level of education. By giving students real responsibility, exposing them to a range of new political experiences, and providing training on everything from outreach, to fundraising, to establishing relationships with the media, the Youth Caucus will open doors for students and make them more attractive to colleges and future employers.

II. The Organization

The Youth Caucus does not discriminate. We encourage students to apply from all different backgrounds, from all ends of the political spectrum, with all levels of political experience and leadership skills. It is a non-profit, non-partisan organization open to youth with a desire to become more engaged in the political process. The student Board of Directors will be interviewing applicants for positions on the Leadership Council. Students will choose to take on specific projects or ongoing responsibilities, depending on their interests, skills, and level of commitment.

A) Community Benefits: The Youth Caucus is good for Oregon. The Youth Caucus strives to:

1. **Develop Leaders:** The skills and knowledge students will gain through participation in the Youth Caucus will position them to become more educated members of the community and make for a more informed electorate.
2. **Engage Young People:** The program will engage the student leaders more deeply into politics and civic participation, and specific projects like voter registration drives and issue forums will engage still more young people in the process.
3. **Generate New Ideas:** The community will benefit from hearing the youth perspective on a variety of issues. Students may provide valuable insight or ideas that would normally be overlooked or dismissed by older, more entrenched policymakers.
4. **Enhance Public Interest Capacity:** Students provide a fleet of young, energetic volunteers to support the efforts of other related public interest or non-profit organizations.

B) Participant Benefits: The Youth Caucus is good for students. The Youth Caucus strives to build:

1. **Networks:** Student leaders will forge lifetime professional, political, and social relationships and meet other smart, politically motivated students from schools statewide.
2. **Skills:** Students will have the opportunity to develop a range of leadership, organizational, and communication skills as well as learn about particular laws, political issues, processes, and candidates.
3. **Thinking:** Students will be encouraged to discuss issues and develop innovative programs and events to educate their peers.
4. **Credentials:** Participation on the Leadership Council will offer verifiable experience (a.k.a “resume boost”) that will help students with future educational and career goals. Adult Mentors will be able to attest to their contributions in college, job, or scholarship recommendation letters.
5. **Cause:** Students will advocate for issues that they have identified as important to youth.
6. **Internship Opportunities:** The Youth Caucus’s collaborations with the Oregon Bus Project, other community non-profit organizations, government agencies, and elected officials will expose students to many internship opportunities throughout the community.
7. **Power:** Student leaders will have the opportunity to speak at various political events, serve as the key advocates for students in Oregon, help choose the issues and events that the Youth Caucus concentrates on, and select the next generation of Youth Caucus leaders.
8. **Fun:** Youth Caucus participants are invited to participate in many important community and political events, get to be part of an exciting new organization, and have endless opportunities to make new friends from other schools.

C) Elements of Participation

1. **Project Management & Event Participation:** Each student on the Leadership Council will have responsibility for a certain element of Youth Caucus operations or organize a particular event. Youth Caucus Leadership Council members will be encouraged to attend all Youth Caucus events along with friends and family.
2. **Committee Meetings:** Youth Caucus operations are divided into five areas: Student Outreach, Media Communications, Development & Finance, Political Vision, and Planning & Logistics. All students on the Leadership Council will be part of at least one Committee of their choice. While all students take part in all events and activities, students' main responsibilities depend on their participation within a particular Committee. Student Committee Directors will determine the meeting schedule with their group as necessary. While the Directors will determine meeting agendas and run meetings, designated adult Community Mentors will participate in meetings, offer guidance, and assist with gathering necessary resources.
3. **Monthly Leadership Council Meetings:** All participants in the Youth Caucus Leadership Council and Community Mentors will meet monthly to discuss their Committees' progress, needs, and goals. Monthly meetings will serve to keep all students informed, to help students establish connections and overlaps between Committees, and to give students an opportunity to socialize with other students and Community Mentors. The Youth Caucus President and Vice President are responsible for determining the monthly meeting agenda and running the meetings.

D) Sample Projects & Events

Youth Caucus Only: The Youth Caucus will be responsible for organizing three events each year, with the focus and scope of projects varying depending on election cycles and current events:

1. Issue Forum- Students will choose the issue to discuss and the structure of the forum/debate/dialogue
2. Student Recruitment for Political Events- i.e. testifying at a public hearing during the legislative session, voter registration drives, canvassing during election years, School Board Candidate Debate, Lobby Day in Salem, etc.
3. Annual House Party or Fundraiser- To raise awareness about the Youth Caucus and solicit financial contributions

Joint Efforts: The Youth Caucus will participate in other community events and assist the Oregon Bus Project with events where student participation is necessary or encouraged, such as:

1. Oregon Bus Project's Trick-or-Vote Halloween Get Out The Vote Canvass
2. Annual Bus Project Gala in May
3. Bus Project Ballot Measure Voter Guides
4. Stand for Children school funding rallies
5. Annual School Awards Banquet in selected cities
6. Other Community Youth Education or Leadership Program Events

E) Currently Underway

- **Raising funds and resources** to support the program
- **Encouraging student leaders** from high schools throughout Oregon to apply for the Leadership Council
- **Recruiting adult mentors** from the community.
- **Raising awareness** and spreading the word by developing a website, contacting school teachers and administrators
- **Building partnerships** with eligible organizations and offices

III. TESTIMONIALS

Why Join?

Talented former Bus Project interns provide testimonies that show why the Bus Project is the organization to give birth to the Youth Caucus

“I can’t really express how much I miss you all...People keep asking me whether I’ve experienced culture shock coming back from India and I keep thinking that a far bigger shock is missing the Bus...not to say that India wasn’t incredible, but just that I never became so fully part of a community nor fashioned such a coherent life for myself in another place as I did with y’all.” -- **Liba Rubenstein, a former Bus Project fellow at Yale, upon returning from travels in India**

“I learned so much from my internship that I have started my own student-run think tank based on the new progressive principles of the Bus Project.” -- **Quinn Wilhelmi, Stanford, co-founder of the Roosevelt Institute**

“I learned more in 3 months here than I did during in 4 years as a political science student.” -- **Sarah Masterson, Boston University**

The Bus Project was my first experience with "people power" and the role of grassroots activists in affecting the established political system. The Bus, even before there was a bus, symbolized everything that I thought was good about politics. I had the importance of the face-to-face contact engrained in my consciousness, and I most assuredly became aware that even impoverished political groups like ours could make a huge difference by contributing plenty of the great American currency, time. I hope that I will continue to be irresistibly drawn back into the Bus universe every time I return to Oregon from my not-as-good home in New York City. -- **Brian Wagner, Columbia University student**

Working as an intern for the Bus Project I received such a wide variety of campaign and political experience, as well as a depth of knowledge about state and local government. Never have I had such an all-inclusive experience as I did during my internship with the Bus Project. -- **Shannon Jones, recent graduate from American University**

IV. Ways to help

- **Blab!** Word of mouth is key. Talk about us to help us find top-notch student applicants, adult Mentors, and potential donors.
- **Connect!** Put us in contact with like-minded organizations interested in partnering with the Youth Caucus on events. Put us in contact with like-minded individuals interested in advising one of the five Committees.
- **Donate!** The Youth Caucus needs resources of all kinds, from printing to food to office supplies.

For more information or questions, please contact:

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