



OKLAHOMA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Oklahoma Youth Advisory Council (OYAC) Handbook

Welcome

Welcome to the Oklahoma Youth Advisory Council (OYAC)!

You are joining a group of passionate young leaders who use their voices and lived experiences to help shape systems that impact children and youth across Oklahoma. As a member, you play a key role in elevating youth perspectives, informing policy and practice, and helping decision-makers better understand what matters most to young people.

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) serves as the convening agency and provides coordination and administrative support. OYAC is a youth-driven body - members set priorities, guide discussions, and develop recommendations that inform state-level decision-making.

Purpose

The purpose of OYAC is to ensure that youth and young adult voices are meaningfully included in decisions that affect children, youth, and families across Oklahoma. Members draw from lived experience and community knowledge to advise systems, agencies, and partners on how to improve programs, services, and policies.

Goals

1. Amplify Youth Voice
Ensure youth perspectives and lived experience inform policy, program, and system development.

2. Promote Awareness & Reduce Stigma
Increase understanding of behavioral health, child- and family-serving systems, and youth wellbeing.
 3. Strengthen Support Systems
Partner with agencies and organizations to improve access to effective, youth-centered services.
 4. Build Leadership Capacity
Support youth development in advocacy, communication, and leadership skills.
 5. Encourage Peer Engagement
Create opportunities for youth-to-youth connection, collaboration, and mentorship.
 6. Monitor & Evaluate Impact
Provide feedback on initiatives and recommendations to support continuous improvement.
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Council Structure

Co-Chairs (2)

Role: Lead meetings and represent OYAC in approved settings.

Responsibilities:

- Collaborate with the OCCY Coordinator to develop agendas
- Facilitate inclusive discussion
- Serve as youth liaisons to partners and stakeholders
- Support progress toward council goals

Council Members

Composition:

- 8–12 youth and young adults (ages 16–24) representing diverse backgrounds, geographic areas, and lived experiences.
 - Preference is given to applicants with personal experience in child welfare, juvenile justice, or mental/behavioral health, though other youth-serving system experience is also considered.

Responsibilities:

- Share lived experience and perspectives
- Participate in meetings, projects, and working groups
- Represent youth voice respectfully and thoughtfully

OCCY Coordinator

Role: Adult advisor and support

Responsibilities:

- Provide logistical, administrative, and facilitation support
 - Offer leadership development and mentorship
 - Serve as OCCY's primary point of contact
 - Support partnerships and funding coordination
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Meetings & Decision-Making

- Frequency: Monthly, with additional meetings as needed
- Format: Virtual, in-person, or hybrid
- Decision-Making: Consensus-based whenever possible

Agenda Items

Members may request agenda items by contacting the OCCY Coordinator prior to meetings.

Membership & Selection

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be between 16–24 years old at the time of application
- Have personal lived experiences with one or more youth-serving state systems. Lived experience must be personal and may not be solely professional or academic.
- Reside in Oklahoma
- Demonstrate interest in improving systems that impact youth

Applicants who apply at age 24 may complete their term but may not renew once they age out at 26 years old.

Selection Process

1. Application review
 2. Introductory phone interview
 3. Panel interview
 4. OSBI Background Check (required for members age 18+)
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Background Check

Members age 18 or older must complete an Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) background check following selection. Results are reviewed confidentially and do not automatically disqualify participation.

Terms of Service

- Two-year term, renewable if mutually agreed
 - Voluntary resignation with written notice
 - Consistent participation expected
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Attendance & Participation

Active participation includes contributing during and/or after meetings. Life circumstances are understood, and members are asked to communicate with the OCCY Coordinator if support or flexibility is needed.

Compensation & Reimbursement

Compensation and reimbursement are pending available funding and approval.

Covered Activities

- Meetings
- Approved events and trainings
- Official travel or speaking engagements

Covered Expenses

- Travel (mileage, airfare, public transportation, parking, tolls, ground transportation)
- Lodging and meals (if approved)

Per diem may be provided and is dependent on funding availability, travel requirements, and state guidelines.

Promotion & Media Guidelines

- Members may share personal experiences
- Only the OCCY Director or OCCY Public Information Officer may issue official statements on behalf of OYAC

- Members should include disclaimers when speaking publicly
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Amendments & Updates

Proposed amendments will be reviewed by the council. Voting thresholds may vary depending on the nature of the amendment and will be determined at the time of consideration.

Partnership with the Children’s State Advisory Workgroup

OYAC operates as an initiative and partner of the Children’s State Advisory Workgroup (CSAW). CSAW is a cross-agency body focused on improving children’s mental and behavioral health systems in Oklahoma. OYAC provides youth perspective to inform CSAW priorities, recommendations, and system-level decision-making.

Convening Agency

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) convenes and supports OYAC by providing staffing, facilitation, and administrative coordination. The OYAC is in partnership with the Youth and Adolescent Services department with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Acknowledgment

By selecting “Yes” in the Manual section of the application, you acknowledge that you have reviewed and understand the Oklahoma Youth Advisory Council Handbook and agree to uphold its expectations. A signature will be required upon selection.