



Building a Youth Advisor Team

In order to build and maintain a healthy, vibrant, and growing youth program, it's important to have a committed team of adult allies involved. This resource offers guidance to congregations who are building a new team of adult advisors, re-evaluating their current needs or seeking new adult allies.

The guidance below can help leaders and staff determine:

- What types of adult supports are needed for local youth ministry
- How to structure a team of adults working with youth
- Whether to hire paid youth advisory staff
- How to recruit youth advisors and other adult allies
- How to develop a job description for adult ally roles

Adult roles in congregational youth ministry

There are a number of possible roles for adults supporting youth ministry in a congregation. These roles might include some or all of the following:

- **Youth advisors:** 2 or more adults who are present at youth group meetings and on Sundays, who help to plan activities, foster youth leadership, and walk with youth through their personal and spiritual development. Advisors often accompany youth to regional youth cons and CanUuddle.
- **Lead youth advisor:** Some congregations have one youth advisor who takes on more of the responsibility, including helping to recruit other adults and working more closely with the congregation's religious educator and other staff to manage the youth program.
- **Youth coordinator:** Usually a paid part-time position, the youth coordinator would take on much of the administrative work involved in planning and supporting the youth program. They are also involved in youth group activities. A youth coordinator is common in congregations with large youth groups or where religious educators do not have responsibility for youth.

Questions to help determine adult support needs for your youth program:

- How many youth do you currently have, or expect to have in the near future?
- Do you hope to grow or diversify your youth program, with the help of paid or volunteer advisors?
- What is the age, experience, level of involvement, and leadership capacity of current youth?
- How many adults are currently involved, and do they want to continue in their roles?
- How often does the youth group meet, what types of activities are they doing, and what adult supports are necessary for those activities?
- How many adults are required to maintain a safe ratio of adults to youth for youth group meetings and events? (the CUC recommends 1:8)
- How many total person hours (volunteer and paid) would create a sustainable youth program where no one person holds complete responsibility for youth ministry, and



- volunteers aren't set up to burnout?
- What types of personalities, skills, experiences, and aptitudes would best support youth and youth programs in your congregation?
 - If current youth advisors want to continue their role, what types of people would compliment or create a better balance for youth?
 - Does the religious educator have responsibility for youth, and if so, how much capacity does that staff person have to support youth ministry and manage volunteers?
 - Does the minister work with youth, and if so, how much time are they able to devote to the youth program?
 - Do you have a good pool of potential volunteers and parents to draw from - for specific roles and tasks, and to support youth events, fundraisers, social action projects, etc?

Job Descriptions for Youth Advisors and Adult Allies

Before approaching potential youth advisors, it's important to be clear about what you're asking people to commit to. Most people are reluctant to commit to an ambiguous volunteer opportunity, as they may worry about the time involved, or don't want to make a long term commitment. Job descriptions also help congregations identify the skills, traits, and experiences they are seeking in volunteers, and allow staff to make more personal asks during recruitment.

We have included some sample job descriptions in the appendix to this guide to give you ideas and language to create your own congregation-specific role descriptions.

Elements of a job description:

1. Title - are you looking for youth advisors, general youth program volunteers, a youth coordinator, or another youth ministry role?
2. Paid or volunteer - will they be receiving an honorarium or salary for this role?
3. Time commitment - how many hours per week are expected?
4. Term length - how long would you like the person to stay in this role?
5. Main responsibilities - what are the weekly, monthly, and annual tasks expected?
6. Qualities, skills and experience - what minimum, and ideal aptitudes should a youth advisor have?
7. Minimum age, membership and safety check requirements

Key skills and qualities: There is no one set of traits that makes a great youth advisor. But it's helpful when adults have some basic skills and aptitudes when starting out, and a willingness to learn and grow. The [Competencies for Ministry To and With Youth](#) is a great resource that outlines entry-level, basic and advanced competencies in 8 key areas and can help when making a job description.

See the "Finding new advisors" section for suggestions on the types of people to approach for youth ministry roles.

Relevant experience: Although it's great when youth advisors have prior experience working with teenagers, this isn't the only, or the most important quality to look for. Think creatively about which adults to approach to be youth advisors and volunteers - you might be surprised about the types of people who have made great advisors!



Term limits: While some volunteers want to serve in the same role for a long time, we recommend setting 2 or 3-year term limits, with the possibility of renewal to a maximum of 5 years. Having very long-serving youth advisors can create unhealthy dynamics within the youth group where the adult acts as the gatekeeper to the rest of the congregation or makes it hard for new adults to get involved. Serving as a youth advisor can be a rewarding and enriching experience for adults, but it should not be the only way that adults participate in congregational life.

Establishing term limits encourages healthy turnover, makes space for a variety of adults to be involved, and gives youth a more diverse support system. Term limits can also prevent burn-out among advisors.

Travel: Youth advisors often accompany youth to events like regional youth cons and CanUUdle. Ideally, travel to cons shouldn't be required to become an advisor, but may be encouraged. Other advisors, parents or volunteers may act as drivers and con advisors as well. Paid youth coordinators may be required to travel to events, and it's important to be clear about that in the job description.

Age and safety requirements: CUC guidelines require that adults working with youth be 25 or older, and we recommend this minimum age for congregational youth ministry. Adults need to be mature enough to create appropriate boundaries and need to have some emotional distance from their own youth group or teenage experience. This distance helps advisors focus on the needs of youth and find other ways to have their own emotional and spiritual needs met.

Congregations usually also require that advisors be members, and involved for enough time to have an accountable relationship with the congregation.

The CUC recommends that all adults working with youth have a recent vulnerable sector police check done within the last 2 years. A copy should be kept on file by the congregation. See the "Selection" section below for more details.

Finding New Youth Advisors

Qualities to be aware of in prospective youth advisors:

- **Who is *willing* versus who is *best suited* to this work:** Too often we set overly low expectations for our volunteers and can get more concerned with having a spot filled than with someone who is truly qualified to do this work. More important than any youth-related experience, advisors should be grounded in their UU identity and able to be present for youth as a spiritually mature adult.
- **Who has an understanding of youth ministry as spiritual deepening:** Ideally, prospective youth advisors are interested in working with teens because they understand this service work to be a form of personal spiritual deepening. They understand they will be changed, challenged, and asked to grow as a result of ministering to and with youth and they are open to that experience.
- **Who is already getting their spiritual needs met:** Although youth ministry can be very fulfilling, youth advisors should have their own social and emotional supports and spiritual practices. This could be through other areas of their church involvement or through activities like meditation and yoga. Having good boundaries and outside supports will help advisors be present for youth and make space for each youth's spiritual development.



People to approach:

- Parents of youth who have recently bridged or aged out.
- Young adults who had a positive and meaningful youth group experience
 - Advisors should be 25 or over and have healthy emotional distance from their own youth group experience. Adults should not become advisors in order to relive their youth or deal with sadness about bridging out of youth group.
- Long time UUs who have a deep, secure sense of their UU identity.
- Adults of all kinds can make good advisors, even if they are not very outgoing or silly, and even if they are initially apprehensive about working with teenagers.
- Parents of current youth can be good advisors, but it's vital to get consent from their youth before asking them.
 - Youth group can be an important alternative to home and school life for many youth and having their parents as advisors can disrupt that.
 - Youth group is an opportunity for teenagers to develop healthy and supportive relationships with adults outside of their family.
- No couples: It is no longer considered best practice for both members of a couple to serve as youth advisors at the same time as it can create unhealthy power dynamics.
 - If a couple is interested in youth ministry, consider having one person as a youth advisor and the other as an occasional volunteer or other type of mentor.

How to recruit new advisors:

- **Ask people directly** and preferably in person. Although it may seem time-consuming, this approach will likely lead to better results than emails or general callouts in newsletters or on bulletin boards.
 - Approach people that would be suitable candidates, according to the youth group's needs, and the list of desired qualities and skills.
 - Make sure to be clear about the type of commitment and time involved - share the job description if possible.
 - Share with them which skills and traits you think would make them a good fit for youth ministry. A personalized ask is always more effective and shows that you're not just looking for "any warm body" to fill the role.
- **Congregational notices and ads:**
 - In addition to direct asks, do put out some general notices so the congregation knows that the youth group is looking. Try a short, concise ad in the order of service, church newsletter, or in Sunday announcements.
 - This is a helpful approach if you want to cast a wide net and/or have several advisors to recruit, but don't expect a lot of uptake from general postings.
 - Consider asking the youth group to help with the ad, or do a skit or live announcement on Sunday morning.
- **Recommendations from youth and youth advisors:** Youth can often recommend adults who they enjoy being around, and who would bring something special to the youth group.

**Tips for approaching potential youth advisors:**

- An ask from the religious educator or minister generally carries more weight and shows that this role is vital to the ministry of the church. The minister and other leaders can also help brainstorm adults to approach.
- Tell the potential volunteer why you have approached them:
 - Mention specific qualities, skills and experience that they have.
 - Tell them why youth ministry is important to the congregation.
 - Share why you think this would be a rewarding and meaningful experience (see below for examples of why adults love working with youth).
- Be clear about the expectations for the role, the timeline for the commitment, and the supports in place - see the "Job Description" section for help building a concrete description before you recruit.
- Don't put people on the spot to answer yes - Respect everyone's "sacred yes" and "sacred no" and ensure that if/when they say yes, they are ready for the commitment.
- Take note of people who might be interested in being youth advisors in the future.
- Outline specific next steps - This might include an information session, a meeting with current youth and advisors, a written application, or a meeting with the DRE.
 - See below for guidance on selection and vetting.

Selecting and Vetting Youth Advisors

There are many ways to recruit, select and vet youth advisors and other adult allies working in youth ministry. It's up to each congregation to set out a process that works for them and is consistent with their safety policies and practices. Below are some common options for selection and vetting that can help you build your own process. This list includes some best practices that may not be possible or necessary in every situation. However you proceed, make sure that youth, parents and youth advisors are consulted and part of the selection process.

Selection committee: For optimal transparency and accountability, it's helpful to designate a small group that manages the advisor recruitment and selection process. This can include the religious educator (if their job includes youth ministry), current and past youth advisors, the youth coordinator, a board member, minister, parents, and other congregational leaders. If there have been challenges with the current youth advisor team, you may not want them involved in selecting new advisors.

The selection committee should consult with youth, but it may not be appropriate for youth to be involved with all aspects of the vetting process. Both youth and adults should have "veto" power if they have strong concerns about any candidate, or if youth feel that they just don't connect with a prospective advisor.

Application process: Some congregations have a written application process for new youth advisors. It's good practice to keep a written record of the youth advisor selection process, so there's a paper trail in case any issues arise in the future. If there are more applicants than positions available, keep their applications for the other volunteer opportunities.

The application can be as simple as a Google Form that asks for contact information, why they want to work with youth, what experience they bring, and any other criteria you'd like to ask about. This



can also be done verbally in a meeting, but we still recommend taking and keeping notes.

Information session and orientation: If your congregation is looking for more than one new advisor, organize an information session for anyone who is interested in working with youth. This can also be a good opportunity to recruit other types of youth ministry volunteers, such as mentors, event volunteers, drivers, and others.

- Advertise the info session well in advance through Sunday announcements, bulletin boards, personal emails, and notices in the newsletter.
- Outline the key roles you are recruiting for, with related responsibilities, average weekly or monthly time commitment, term, and minimum requirements.
- Talk about the joys of working with youth, drawing on current advisors and resources like the list below.
- Emphasize the importance of creating safe, healthy and supportive relationships with youth - this is a vital part of the congregation's ministry and an important leadership role!
- Offer time for questions and answers. Make sure that at least one current advisor can attend and answer questions about the joys and challenges of their role.
- Lay out easy next steps for people who are interested - this may include a written application, a meeting with the selection committee, and/or a meeting with the youth group.

Meet and greet with youth: If the congregation already has an established youth group, set up a time for youth to meet potential new advisors and ask them questions that they come up with. This can be a fun and empowering process and gives youth a measure of ownership. Meeting the youth can also help adults feel more comfortable and decide if this is the right role for them.

- If there are more interested candidates than youth advisor positions, youth feedback from the meet and greet should be a determining factor in selection.
- In all cases, youth should have a chance to express concerns about any candidates who they don't feel comfortable having as advisors. This can happen after meeting all potential new advisors.
- We recommend doing basic safety vetting before this meet and greet (see below) so that youth are meeting and choosing from adults who would all be appropriate youth advisors.

Reference checks: All short-listed candidates should have character reference checks (in addition to Police Records checks). The selection committee should speak to people within and beyond the congregation who:

- Can speak to the candidate's experience working with youth
- Are current or former youth
- Can speak to the candidate's UU identity and spiritual grounding

Safety vetting: Each congregation should have (or develop) guidelines to ensure that all adults working with children and youth are safety checked before beginning their roles. This would be included in a Safe Congregation Policy or a similar policy.

Recommended safety vetting steps:

- Police record check: Every new youth advisor should provide a recent police record check to the congregation obtained within the last 2 years. Often called a "vulnerable sector check" or "police record check for people working with vulnerable sectors" (may have different names in each province). Some congregations cover the fee for their staff and volunteers' police record checks.



- Do a “red flag check” within the congregation: The selection committee should confidentially ask the minister, DRE and board president whether they have any concerns about youth advisor candidates. They may be able to share important information about past issues that are relevant.
- Red flag check with CUC staff: An optional step that can be helpful, especially if the new advisor has moved from another congregation or has been involved at the national level. CUC staff try to be proactive about informing congregations of concerns but aren’t able to keep track of role changes in every congregation. So please reach out to youth@cuc.ca.
- If the youth advisor will be driving youth to events, the congregation should have copies of their driver’s license and insurance policy. Each congregation should have a policy about drivers and personal vehicle use and be clear about insurance requirements.

Choosing youth advisors with care and intention helps create a healthy and thriving youth ministry, and signals to youth and adults that this work is important to the congregation. There is no perfect way to recruit and select youth advisors and other adult allies, but we hope this document has given you a good place to start, and options to work with.

Why adults love working with youth!

This is what real youth advisors have said about their role in youth ministry. Feel free to use this list to help recruit adults in your own congregation.

- UU youth programs literally save lives. It is rewarding to be involved in such important work and help provide a safe space for teens.
- I love seeing youth develop and come into their own over time. Watching youth grow into young adults and have a strong sense of who they are is a great part of being an advisor.
- I enjoy helping youth develop skills, especially learning to take leadership and responsibility. It's really rewarding to see a youth come into youth group as a shy, hesitant group member and then become a leader with support.
- It's important to me that youth have a supportive, safe community of peers outside of high school. Our youth program gives teenagers a respite from the social and academic stresses at school and lets them be their own person without pressure.
- When I am at youth group or attending a youth con, I get to witness a more ideal version of UU community - where everyone is respected and loved and where we live the principles together.
- Working with youth gives me a better understanding of what it means to be UU.
- I love getting to know other youth advisors and adults who are in this special role.



Sample Job Descriptions:

Volunteer Youth Advisor Job Description - UU Church of Shenandoah Valley

PURPOSE: To coordinate Youth Program Activities, and provide support and guidance to the youth in grades 9 - 12.

GOAL: To promote the spiritual growth and/or transformation of the youth of UUCSV. Youth advisors engage in a ministry with youth that emphasizes fun, religious identity, community, the democratic process, and service.

Statement of Accountability: As an advisor, you report to and are supported by the Director of Religious Education. Additional support comes from Minister and Religious Education Committee. You are ultimately responsible to the Board of Directors and to the congregation.

TIME FRAME: As an advisor, you commit to serving as a part of an advising team for at least one year. Advising teams divide up weekly responsibilities so that you will be with the youth approximately one in two Sundays. In addition, advisors typically participate in one to three weekend retreats, district conferences ("cons"), or youth/adult development conferences each year.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- Commitment to the spiritual growth of youth, and the ability to see the inherent worth and dignity of every young person.
- Ability to work as a part of an advising team.
- Basic knowledge of what it means to be a religious liberal, a sense of your own liberal faith.
- Your own social and emotional support network.

RESPONSIBILITIES

PROGRAM (Youth and support):

- Nurture the spiritual growth and/or transformation of youth in cooperation with their parents/guardians, and the rest of the church community.
- Assist and support youth leaders in planning and carrying out the youth program as set forth by the RE Committee.
- Collaborate with DRE and Minister to plan intergenerational or YRUU led worship services in the sanctuary.
- Help to motivate youth/adults to participate in activities.
- Presence at youth group meetings and events.
- Attend to your own personal spiritual growth and/or transformation by attending worship services and other UUCSV programs.
- Have fun!

COVENANT RELATED RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Provide support and guidance to youth as needed, maintaining confidentiality unless there is a potential for injury to self or others or in situations where abuse is occurring or there is a potential



for such.

- Seek supervision from DRE and Minister for all significant concerns.
- Solicit adequate parent volunteer supervision per guidelines, one adult to 8 youth for all events and at least 3 adults for any sleepover event.
- Secure permission slips and Behavioral Covenants for each youth attending trips and overnights.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

- Meet with DRE once a month.
- Apprise DRE of all plans and occurrences in youth groups.
- Create/have youth create flyers for events and distribute to youth.
- Maintain an up to date email list of our youth.
- Make reservations/arrangements with places for events.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Read available literature and research internet resources on youth groups and advisor roles.
- Attend youth advisor training opportunities when possible.

All volunteers who work with minors must agree to and sign the Code of Ethics and submit a Police Records Check. Reference checks may be requested of volunteers working with minors.



Paid Youth Coordinator Position - 20 hours/week

UU Community Church of Washington County

Responsibilities

- Facilitate and develop the youth program in collaboration with the Minister, Religious Education (RE) Oversight Team and CaYRE Team (Children and Youth Religious Exploration) to continue to develop the senior youth program
- Reflect and support the vision and priorities of the youth and the congregation
- Responsible for planning and facilitating regular meetings, currently scheduled for Sunday evenings, and occasional other events
- Plan and coordinate supervision for all Youth Group activities including adult chaperones for trips, facilitation of Youth participation in PNWD Youth CONs and retreats, keeping safety in mind at all functions
- Work closely with adult lay leaders and youth to plan and present all congregation talent show and fundraiser once annually during January or February.
- Support YRUU Group in envisioning, planning and presenting annual Youth-Led Worship in Spring of each year, working closely with Worship Associate and adult lay leaders.
- Ensure a balanced youth program that includes worship (Youth-Led Service and intergenerational), leadership opportunities for youth, social action, fundraising, and fun social activities
- Act as a mentor and role model for youth
- Clearly communicate with youth, parents, supervisor, volunteers and other stakeholders/committees
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality while following mandatory reporting requirements
- Continue in annual ongoing professional development via workshops, webinars, etc.
- Provide community building experiences both within and outside the church
- Keep connected to district youth programming and attend 1-2 Cons (District Youth Conventions) per year with the youth

Qualifications Needed

- Minimum of 25 years of age and must pass a background check
- Experience working with youth and values consistent with Unitarian Universalism (not a member of UCCWC)
- Ability to provide spiritual, emotional and intellectual support for challenges 9-12th grade youth experience
- Ability to inspire leadership and provide practical assistance in the areas of Unitarian Universalist religious exploration, social justice, and church life while demonstrating appropriate, healthy, professional boundaries
- To be able to demonstrate planning and organizational skills
- To be conversant with current technology widely used by youth
- Valid driver's license preferred



Supervision: The Youth Advisor will report directly to the Minister. Youth Advisor will meet no less than monthly in person with Minister. During the Ministerial Sabbatical time the Youth Advisor will meet with the RE Oversight Team.

Hours: Approximately 25 hours per month to include: Sunday mornings, administrative duties, supervisory meetings, planning, field trips, overnights and Cons, and communication with youth, parents, etc.

Stipend: [Insert monthly stipend or salary here]