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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

### **1. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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The purpose of this manual is to provide information on how to develop and sustain Youth Leadership Forums for Students with Disabilities (YLFs). But we feel that it is important to begin by sharing our perspective on how and why we started YLF.

- To a great extent, the forum ensued from the vision and dedication of the volunteer members and the staff of the California Governor's Committee, especially Dr. Janice Emerzian, Dr. Paul K. Miller, Harry Servidio, Catherine Kelly Baird, Chuck Kassis, and Hope Yasui.
- The project could never have happened without Tom Nagle, former Director of California's Employment Development Department, who strongly supported the forum since it was first proposed.
- During the forum's incubation, we received important guidance from California's Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Project and from the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Foundation. In fact, the initial idea for the project was generated from discussions between Roberto Gracia, former Director of the Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Project, and Catherine Kelly Baird, Executive Director of the California Governor's Committee.
- Our dream of expanding the project beyond California could never have been realized without the caring and commitment of Tony Coelho, John Lancaster and Maggie Roffee of the former President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

- Numerous committed volunteers and staff contributed to the original written YLF curriculum, but special recognition goes to Denise Bissonnette, Kris Lange and Catherine Kelly Baird. The first “How To” reference manual was prepared by Kris Lange and Catherine Kelly Baird in 1998, and Catherine prepared this 2002 revision. This updated manual also reflects important modifications suggested by our partner YLF States and Territories listed in the Appendix.
- Another special thanks for editorial assistance from Kris Lange, Dr. Paul K. Miller, and YLF alumni Dria Fearn and Christina Mills; to Danny Gounder and Brenda Greenhalgh for printing and production; and to Chris Cademarti and Hewlett Packard (Americus Integration Unit, Roseville, California) for providing the CD-Rom format copies).
- Thanks also to the current volunteer members of the California Governor’s Committee for their exceptional caring and service.
- And one final thanks to the current staff of the California Governor’s Committee: Charlie Kaplan, Hope Yasui, Pam Porteous-Hunt, Shayn Anderson, Doug Gordy, Danny Gounder, Debbie Otto, Kim Carey, Regina Wallace and Ryan Nagle. Their exceptional commitment to young people with disabilities has enabled YLF to become a truly exceptional program.

## 2. HISTORY: WHY WE STARTED THE YLF

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In 1989, we decided that we could promote the employment of all people with disabilities more effectively by doing more to inspire and prepare disabled youth. We felt that developing the leadership skills of young people with disabilities could help them to confront the barriers to employment and social participation they face as they become adults.

Most importantly, we envisioned creating a forum which embraced the philosophy of disability culture and taught students to understand and not be ashamed of their experiences as people with disabilities. The need for such a forum was in part the result of the great success of important policy shifts toward “mainstreaming” and “full inclusion”. These social concepts did much to dismantle segregated education for young people with disabilities. But they also encouraged an environment which rewarded youth for attempting to fit in and for denying their unique experiences as people with disabilities.

We envisioned creating an annual, statewide training which would provide a powerful formative experience to high school juniors and seniors with disabilities, accelerate their learning and which would aim to:

- Make the young people aware that they have both a right and a civic responsibility to secure the highest form of employment for which they are qualified.
- Encourage youth not to put unnecessary limits on their academic and career goals by exposing them to successful role models--adults with disabilities whom have a variety of achievements.
- Give the student delegates skills and the knowledge of resources that can help them develop and achieve those goals.

- Motivate the delegates to become active in their communities and to realize their leadership potential, especially by serving as role models for other young people with disabilities and as advocates for the education, training and employment of all people with disabilities.
- Teach the delegates about the cultural history of their predecessors with disabilities, including the long struggle for civil rights, resulting in such legislation as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Provide an opportunity, unlike any currently existing, for young people with disabilities: An intensive forum which emphasizes leadership, independence, and personal and career goal setting.

### **3. CRITERIA FOR FORMAL AFFILIATION— REQUIREMENTS OF ALL YLFs**

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#### **BACKGROUND—WHY WE HAVE FORMAL REQUIREMENTS**

The YLF was created by the California Governor’s Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons in 1992. Many volunteers worked with the Governor’s Committee members and staff to develop the innovative YLF curriculum. It was based both on existing successful youth leadership projects and original concepts, which teach young people how to reach their career and personal potential.

The YLF model has proven to be extremely successful as a teaching model for young people with disabilities. The California Governor’s Committee and our national partner, the (former) President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, strongly supported replicating it in other states, territories and nations. However, a new YLF must maintain the integrity of the original YLF to be allowed formal affiliation and use of the name “California Model Youth Leadership Forum for Students With Disabilities (YLF).” We developed these criteria for affiliation in 1992, and they are still required for all YLF projects.

Friends of the California Governor’s Committee for Employment of Disabled persons, Inc., is the exclusive legal author of the “California Model Youth Leadership Forum for Students With Disabilities (YLF)” and maintains all rights regarding maintenance of the curriculum and replication of this manual.

#### **REQUIRED PRINCIPLES**

The following are requisites for any affiliated YLF:

1. Students with every kind of disability (as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act) are invited to participate.

2. Every student participant (delegate) must have a disability and have demonstrated potential to be a leader.
3. To the extent possible, delegates should include an equal number of male and female participants.
4. Every guest presenter/role model that meets with the delegates must have a disability. The overall training curriculum should reflect the variety of disabilities.
5. It should be a goal that more than 50% of the volunteer staff are people with disabilities.
6. Delegates and staff should reflect the ethnic diversity of the state/region in which the forum is held.
7. All volunteer staff must understand and support the concept of “disability culture” (although it is recognized as an evolving and somewhat controversial concept).
8. All volunteer staff must understand and support the concept of “self determination” in encouraging the student delegates to establish their own personal and vocational goals.
9. The California Model YLF written curriculum must provide the primary training components of any replicated project. However, the curriculum components may be modified or abbreviated to accommodate schedule requirements and/or the unique characteristics of a state, territory or community.
10. Any group planning to produce a YLF must notify the California Governor’s Committee of their intention and must request, in writing, recognition of their affiliation as a YLF.

## 4. HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL—OVERVIEW, CONTENTS AND FORMAT (NARRATIVES, FORMS AND DOCUMENTS)

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### GENERAL BACKGROUND

In 1998, we wrote the first manual on how to produce a YLF. This second edition of our manual reflects our many years of experience modifying and improving the curriculum. Equally as important, it also reflects the experiences of our committed colleagues who subsequently produced YLFs in the other States and Territories.

We have designed this guide to be a useful reference for those wanting to start their first statewide YLF, those interested in producing smaller regional or community YLFs, and for those who have produced YLFs and want to sustain and enhance their forums.

### HOW THIS GUIDE IS ORGANIZED:

The organization of this second edition of our manual is much more useful as a reference guide. All information is presented as follows.

- 1.) ***Topics are presented in the chronological order in which the forum occurs.*** (Tasks you need to do before, during, and then after the forum).
- 2.) ***Topics are first described in a narrative*** (which discusses the topic and related issues).
- 3.) ***After each subject narrative, sample forms and documents are provided.*** (For example, after “Section B-Before You’re on Site”, we provide sample forms for the Student Delegate Application Form” and common pre-forum correspondence.)
- 4.) The narrative and all ***sample forms and documents are also provided electronically on a CD-ROM*** to enable you to customize forms and documents.

- 5.) ***The Appendix includes sample copies of more lengthy documents***, including the “Student Delegates Program Schedule Workbook”, the “Facilitators’ Guide” and a “YLF Summary Report”.
  
- 6.) ***Task checklists for all components of YLF are also provided in the Appendix.***

## ***B. BEFORE YOU'RE ON SITE: THINGS TO DO TO PREPARE FOR YLF***

### **1. SO YOU WANT TO HAVE A FORUM—HOW TO GET STARTED (AND KEEP GOING AFTER THE FIRST FORUM)**

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Based on our experiences in California, we have the following suggestions to help you get started. We've also included a checklist with timelines in the Appendix.

Convene a group of individuals who will serve as the **YLF Core Planning Task Force** to oversee the project. We suggest about fifteen people, each of who should be able to Chair one of the smaller task force groups subsequently established to carry out the components of the core group's overall plan for creating the forum. (Our suggested task force groups and checklists are listed in the Appendix).

This core group should include strong representation from the disability community, employers who believe in the forum, service providers, advocates, educators, and multicultural representatives from ethnic communities. Also, try to involve people of varying ages, including older adults (who, as we have seen in California, perform extremely well in appropriate volunteer staff roles) and adults in their early twenties, who can speak more closely from the perspective of the young people who will attend the forum as delegates. As with the delegates, it is also very important that your staff be ethnically diverse and represent a wide range of disabilities.

In California, the Chair of our initial core planning task force was the Chair of our Governor's Committee's Education and Youth Subcommittee. Fortunately, our forum volunteers receive staff support from the paid staff of our Governor's Committee. Because many Youth Leadership Forums will probably have no paid staff to start, we recommend recruiting a task force chair that can donate some staff support. An effective Chair is critical to the success of your project. Your Chair should have a solid understanding of a commitment to the forum's goals, should be a diplomatic consensus

builder, and should make the effort to develop and present the forum in an uplifting and fun manner.

Realistically, plan on holding your first forum about two years after your first planning meeting. It will take that long to recruit your main volunteers, secure funding, select and schedule a site, organize a program, and select your student delegates.

After you have produced your first successful forum, this YLF Core Planning Task Force should continue to convene every few months to evaluate the completed forum and plan for the next one. As your success continues, the composition of this group will begin to include more and more YLF alumni. An eventual goal is to have the project administered by the leaders it has created—alumni of YLF.

## 2. FUNDING THE FORUM

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There are many possible ways to fund a Youth Leadership Forum. First of all, we want to emphasize that you should make a concerted effort to secure donations of goods and services and to secure volunteers for staff positions on site during the actual forum.

Our intensive, five-day, four-night forum has an annual budget of \$90,000.00. This amount is for sixty student delegates and forty on-site staff. This average cost of \$1500.00 per delegate is the cost not covered through donations of goods and services and includes budget items such as use of the college dormitories, food for delegates and staff for four days, personal attendant care, interpreter services, audio-visual equipment rental, and transportation (which is a major expense for us because California is so large geographically). Without donated goods and services from volunteer staff, our actual costs would be closer to \$3,000.00 per delegate.

Our forum was initially funded almost exclusively by companies in the private sector--employers in our state who like our ideas and support our goals. Subsequently, we developed a fee-for-service agreement with our State Department of Rehabilitation, which paid for many of the expenses of those delegates who were clients of the department. Currently, we are funded primarily by sources in the private sector, with some additional money provided by our State Department of Rehabilitation, State Department of Education, and State Workforce Investment Board. And, of course, through its contribution of the work of the Governor's Committee staff, our state Employment Development Department has been the most generously supporter of YLF.

We suggest that you distribute a five to ten page briefing packet to request financial support for your forum. It should include basic information on your sponsoring organization or group, a description of what will happen at the forum, a one-page projected budget, and clear instructions on how additional information about the forum can be acquired and how donations can be made.

Although grant monies may be a possible funding source, be certain you clearly understand who will apply for and administer those monies.

Again, we recommend that you vigorously pursue donations of goods and services, even major services such as transportation and the use of college facilities.

Another suggestion, when making a request for funds, bring an alumni with you to discuss their experience at YLF. Such testimonials can be very persuasive.

And a final note of encouragement. As your forum becomes increasingly more established as a recurring event, you can expect your sources for donations to increase. You can also expect your need for funds to decrease as you move beyond start-up expenditures and develop a committed core of volunteers and resources.

### 3. SELECTING A SITE AND DATE

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Selecting the date to hold your forum is a critical initial task and goes hand in hand with selecting your site. To do everything needed to recruit your delegates, you need to set the date of your forum at least one year before you hold it.

Approximately one year before you hold a Youth Leadership Forum, you also need to select a site and enter into a contract to use it. Some other youth programs take place in hotels. But regardless of the length of your forum, we strongly recommend holding it on the campus of a college or university. Positive educational, social, and recreational experiences in that environment will encourage the delegates to establish high academic goals for themselves. Also, we recommend that you hold your forum near your state capitol and schedule program activities in offices associated with your governor and legislature -- settings that will give resonance to the message to your delegates that they have full citizenship and real potential for effective social and political involvement.

When seeking a site for a forum involving sixty student delegates, remember that you will probably need the following:

- dormitory/sleeping rooms for approximately one hundred individuals (60 delegates and 40 staff members, all typically in double occupancy rooms);
- a large meeting room which will allow approximately 125 individuals to attend large group sessions;
- six small meeting rooms for small group sessions involving 10 delegates and up to five staff members;
- an adjacent dining room service -- hopefully, a college cafeteria -- where all meals are provided;
- an area where the delegates can socialize during free time (in our case, the large-group session area, which has a pool table, ping pong table, and music system, serves this purpose); and

- a banquet room in a good hotel or restaurant which can serve a formal lunch for about 250 people during the day of off-site activities

Also, if the delegates will be visiting your state capitol, you will need to schedule the space inside and outside the building where dignitaries can address your delegates and where delegates can meet the press. We use the Governor's Council Room and also the steps outside our State Capitol, which is an excellent area to meet with the press.

Most importantly, all forum sites should meet all accessibility codes under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

#### **4. SELECTING STUDENT DELEGATES**

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The kind of student you select to attend your Youth Leadership Forum is very critical to its success. We must emphasize that we have created, and urge you to create, a leadership forum, and not just a personal enrichment program for young people with disabilities. For the forum to have a maximum social impact, the delegates selected to attend must have demonstrated leadership qualities, particularly the desire and ability to share the inspiration and knowledge they derive from the forum with other young people with disabilities who cannot attend. The ultimate success of the forum depends heavily on the wisdom with which its delegates are chosen.

As many as one hundred young people attend other statewide leadership conferences. However, because of the special needs of many of our delegates, we feel that the slightly smaller group is best for assuring that everyone actively participates and gains substantial benefit from the forum.

Having refined our process for recruiting and selecting delegates over the past five years, we suggest that you first prepare a user-friendly application form and distribute it to every public and private high school in your state or territory and to any advocacy organizations or

individuals or groups who may know of appropriate potential candidates.

Our experience has taught us that student delegate application forms need to be distributed almost one year before the forum and that creating and packaging those applications for mailing takes about three months. We typically mail the application forms the beginning of October with the requirement that completed forms be returned to us no later than the end of January. This timeline is in preparation for the forum to take place the last week of July. These dates allow us the flexibility to extend the deadline date a few weeks, which is usually requested by many applicants.

After application forms are received in our office, we eliminate any candidates who do not clearly meet our criteria for attendance and participation. These criteria include: academic achievement, involvement in extra-curricular activities, demonstrated leadership capabilities, and potential for becoming a leader in the general community and the disability community.

All of the applicants remaining after this screening are then interviewed in their communities by panels of locally based individuals from our network of community mayors' committees or, in communities where we have no such affiliate, by individuals from local offices of the Employment Development Department, the State Department of Rehabilitation or local Independent Living Centers. We assemble about twenty such panels, each representing a geographic region. If it is not possible for a potential delegate to be interviewed in person, representatives from the delegate selection task force group conduct interviews by telephone.

Our experience has taught us that these interviews are critical to the success of the delegate selection process. We have found that some application content cannot be relied on because some students are overly assisted in completing them (especially the essay segments) by well-intentioned family members, counselors, or educators who feel so strongly that the individuals would benefit from the forum. This kind of information, while misleading on paper, becomes known when the individual student is interviewed in person.

After conducting its interviews, each of the selection panels indicates to us whether they feel the applicants are qualified to attend. In the past, we asked them to rank the individuals they interviewed. However, we found that this information is not that helpful since we the students need to be compared to all applicants statewide, not just those interviewed in their community. We then convene a delegate selection task force group to make the final selection of the 60 delegates to attend. The task force group maintains the final decision authority to ensure that the overall group selected represents the diversity of disabilities, gender, and ethnic groups of our state.

The selection of student delegates is finalized early in the month of May for a late July forum. Sixty applicants are notified of their selection as delegates, and all remaining applicants are notified of their status as “alternate” delegates who will be invited to attend the forum if -- as sometimes happens -- students first selected to attend are unable to do so. Timing this notification for early May also gives selected delegates the opportunity for recognition during their schools’ awards ceremonies.

All selected delegates receive two mailings prior to attending the forum. The first mailing notifies them of their selection and includes forms for them to verify that they will attend the YLF. The second mailing includes forms regarding their personal assistant needs, information on how to make travel arrangements, forms for them to sign-off on such as “Rules of Behavior” and press liability releases, plus more details to assist in preparing them to attend the forum. It also includes a brightly colored T-shirt with the Youth Leadership Forum logo -- to be worn in transit to the forum.

## **5. SELECTING FORUM STAFF**

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Our forum includes some individuals who are paid for their services: sign language interpreters and personal care assistants, for example, and, of course, the staff of the Governor's Committee. The forum, however, could not be presented without the very active participation of many volunteers. The staff, as a whole, is organized under our staffing task force.

From the standpoint of staff recruitment, the most critical volunteer staff positions are those who work and reside on site during the entire five-day forum, and who, therefore, most directly influence the student delegates and the quality of their experience at the forum. In addition to reflecting the ethnicity of your state or territory, your onsite staff should be composed of people who understand and model the principles promoted by the forum. Ideally, they should be:

- Individuals with disabilities or affiliated closely with the disability community. (Eventually, we hope to completely staff our event with alumni of the forum, as we have already begun to do in the program assistant and peer counselor positions)
- People who have achieved a professional level in their chosen field
- Individuals with demonstrated leadership abilities
- Individuals with positive attitudes who enjoy spending time with young people
- Individuals with excellent communication skills

We especially look for these characteristics in the individuals who staff the following critical positions: Forum Chair; Co-Facilitators; Co-Counselors; Peer Counselors; and Program Assistants. The Forum Chair and Co-Facilitator positions are most effective if the individual selected serves more than one year. The other staff positions are only for one year, but most individuals reapply and serve several years. As your program evolves, an important goal is to include increasing numbers of YLF alumni as volunteer staff.

We organize the participants into six small groups of ten student delegates, each staffed by two Co-Counselors, one Peer Counselor and one Program Assistant. Co-Counselors are adults who are responsible for leading small group discussions and reinforcing forum objectives. (At least one of the Co-counselors must be a person with a disability). A typical Peer Counselor is a young person who is a few years older than the delegates (usually college age), but who can relate to the students and advise them about personal and social challenges they will soon face. The Program Assistant is in some ways a “Peer Counselor in training” and is primarily responsible for assisting the Co-Counselors in completing more menial kinds of tasks (including helping delegates with writing assignments, posting signs and helping delegates with meal trays.)

As noted above, when selecting forum staff, most important is selecting individuals who understand and model the principles promoted by the forum. It is most important to have volunteer staff who have attitudes that are positive and who enjoy being with young people.

Staff application forms are used for all volunteer positions. However, recruitment may not be widespread, but mostly conducted within the network of volunteers familiar with the forum. The Forum Chair and Co-Facilitators oversee the staff with assistance from the Staffing Task Force Chair.

## 6.FINALIZING THE PROGRAM AND SCHEDULING PRESENTERS

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The YLF program is described in detail in the sample program in this manual's Appendix, "Program Schedule and Student Delegate Workbook". It is also discussed later in this manual. Below is a brief overview of the program to help you plan for scheduling your presenters. The YLF program includes modules, which have been modified or newly developed since we prepared the first YLF manual in 1998. The revisions include input from our colleagues who are now producing YLFs in their States and Territories. You may choose the modules best suited for your state or community. Some we consider optional, but we identify those we feel are crucial to the YLF experience. The overall schedule and primary program components include the following:

### Beginning of Program-

- Staff orientation the afternoon/evening before delegates arrive
- Delegates travel to site the morning the forum begins
- Delegates check-in to dormitories after lunch time
- Welcome and short orientation in small groups in early afternoon

### Five Main Teaching Modules-

1. Principles of Leadership (Includes Welcome Session)
2. The Experience of Disability
3. Technology and Resources to Reach My Goals
4. Living on My Own and Reaching My Career Goals
5. Leading in My Community

Once your schedule is finalized, you can invite your presenters. In keeping with the forum philosophy, all presenters must be people with disabilities who will serve as role models for the student delegates. We suggest you have back-up presenters in mind for each session,

since cancellations will happen. Also, it is helpful to have staff on site who can be back-up presenters if necessary, especially alumni of YLF. We have also learned from experience to only include presenters who have a history of being able to relate to young people. Some excellent speakers relate best to older adults and may not be able to engage young people's interest for long. Older YLF alumni may make excellent speakers, especially for your Mentors Luncheon. Also, we have learned not to schedule sessions too long or without some use of an audio-visual or some interactive experience.

## **7. CREATING SMALL WORK GROUPS OF DELEGATES**

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As mentioned previously, all delegates are assigned to one of several small groups, which meet often during the forum to discuss the issues raised during large-group sessions and complete related workbook exercises. In California, with 60 delegates, we divide into six groups of ten delegates, plus staff. Because communication among delegates is a critical program activity (many of these young people have never had an opportunity to compare notes and communicate candidly with other young people about their disability experiences), we encourage Co-Counselors to allow lively and productive discussions to displace other scheduled small-group activities.

We recommend you allow your Co-Counselors considerable flexibility in managing small-group meetings to meet the specific needs of their small group, even it means workbook exercises aren't totally completed.

When deciding which delegates will be assigned to certain groups, you should consider all of the demographics, which would affect the students' interaction together. It is important to reinforce the value of diversity and inclusiveness and to create opportunities for students to learn from each other by assembling groups with a variety of representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, and different kinds of disabilities. On the other hand, because communication is so critical to this project, we have found that it is helpful to cluster students who

are deaf and communicate with sign language together in small groups so that can easily communicate with each other.

A significant amount of staff time is required to make these small group assignments. In our process, we create a 3 x 5-inch index card with each delegate's name and biographical information. The cards can be easily moved around in stacks until you develop your ideal small group "clusters".

Also, we have learned that it is very important not to allow drop-in visitors to observe the small groups. Such interruptions impede the quality and intimacy of the very important discussion sessions.

## **8. ORGANIZING TRANSPORTATION**

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As indicated by the Transportation Task Force's checklist in the appendix, getting delegates to the forum, to offsite activities, and back home after the forum is a big job. We believe transportation, if well done, has important implications for our program objectives. Many of our delegates have never traveled far from home -- especially by themselves -- and doing so successfully can positively influence their aspirations concerning education, career, recreation, and social involvement. Given these implications, we have learned some important information.

Forum transportation requires significant planning that takes into account the special needs of each of the delegates. The Chair of your Transportation Task Force should be someone who is especially thorough and systematic and who can be involved in all stages of transportation planning and implementation, including issues that arise onsite during the forum.

We strongly recommend that you identify one travel agency that can become relatively well informed about the forum and its special needs and that will make all travel arrangements to and from your forum for delegates, staff, and presenters. We have found that it is most effective if we make our student delegates responsible for getting

themselves from their own homes to their local terminals (the airport, train depot or bus terminal).

We assume responsibility for the delegates once they arrive in Sacramento, where the forum is held, and convey the students between Sacramento's terminals and the forum site with the assistance of volunteer transportation coordinators (and sign language interpreters, personal care assistants, and other staff as needed).

As part of our communication with student delegates before the forum, we inform them that, when they arrive in Sacramento, adults who will recognize delegates by their forum T-shirts will meet them. To facilitate that meeting, we ask the delegates to wear their forum T-shirts in route to the forum. Volunteers greet the delegates, assist them with their luggage, supervise them during waiting periods, and escort them to wheelchair accessible buses (which, in our experience, have been sufficient in capacity to convey all delegates--with and without mobility limitations -- from and to the terminals.

Remember that, especially if you have an offsite event such as a visit to your capitol, your program schedule must take into account the time required to load and unload passengers who use wheelchairs. Also, we must note that since the crisis of September 11, 2001, young people and their families have expressed more anxiety about traveling in general. We all need to remain sensitive about the concerns expressed by all that are traveling to participate in YLF, including the delegates and the staff.

We must note that several of our YLF colleagues in other States and territories have very successfully organized their transportation responsibilities with a bit different slants. Some assume responsibility for the students delegates only after they arrive at their YLF site. They require that the students' families or guardians get the students safely to and from the site, and they provide transportation when on site. How you handle this is your choice, but one concern is not to exclude students who have less transportation options.

However, for follow-up sessions for YLF alumni, requiring that they be responsible for their own transportation seems quite reasonable since by then, participating students would be over 18 years of age.

## **9. PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES (FOR DELEGATES AND STAFF)**

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It is critical to the philosophy of YLF that no students are precluded from participating because of their need for support services. At no charge to the delegates, our program provides interpreters for deaf students, personal care assistants, real time captions, and communication facilitators. We also feel that the emerging service of audio description is very important for students with visual impairments.

An important part of our curriculum includes teaching students to make appropriate choices, which facilitate their living independently. Consequently, we absolutely do not allow students to bring their own interpreters or personal care assistants. As they must learn in the adult world, YLF exposes them to working with other assistants and learning to be responsible for communicating their needs. For these same reasons, we generally never allow family members to serve in any support role. We have made rare exceptions for students with very special circumstances, including extremely fragile medical health.

## **10. PLANNING FOR SAFETY (RULES OF BEHAVIOR, MEDICAL SERVICES, DORMITORY POLICIES, INSURANCE AND EVACUATION PLANS)**

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At the end of this section, we have provided sample materials including: written rules of behavior governing student delegates during the forum and the dormitory evacuation plan presented to our staff during orientation. We strongly recommend that, advised by an attorney, you also secure appropriate insurance coverage before you produce your forum if you are unable to be covered under an umbrella of an existing partner in your project.

## **C. DURING YLF—ON SITE INFORMATION**

### **1. THE YLF PROGRAM: SECTION I--CORE TRAINING SESSION MODULES**

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The YLF curriculum is organized into training session modules. The subjects included in these modules are critical to the success of the YLF experience. We realize that each State, Territory or community has different constraints, including time, location and budget. Consequently, you may need to modify your approach to teaching these subjects.

In the Appendix of this manual, the YLF program is described in detail in a copy of the “Program Schedule and Student Delegate Workbook”. Following the workbook is a copy of the “Facilitators’ Guide to the Program Schedule and Student Delegate Workbook”. This guide outlines in detail the key messages for each teaching module.

The program has a variety of teaching experiences organized under the following five main teaching modules (which were briefly described in this manual under section B, “Before You’re On Site— Things To Do To Prepare for YLF”: Finalizing the Program and Scheduling Presenters “).

1. Principles of Leadership (includes the Welcome Session, which sets the tone for the program and outlines the process of YLF and what will be happening; includes an overview on the principles of leadership, to be further discussed in small group sessions and focused on through completion of the delegates’ “personal Leadership Plans”; this subject is also taught by learning communication skills through the experiences of the dance session and the students’ talent show)

2. The Experience of Disability (one session introduces the students to the concept of disability culture and the history of disability advocacy and legislation; another segment is an experiential session, an Obstacle Awareness Course, which introduces students to other kinds of disabilities than their own)

3. Technology and Resources to Reach My Goals (one session includes demonstrations of assistive technology and another provides information on such resources and services as the Department of Rehabilitation, Independent Living Centers, the Social Security Administration/S.S.I., and College and University Disability Resource services)

4. Living on My Own and Reaching My Career Goals (presented with a panel of guests who are people with different disabilities and various careers living successful lives)

5. Leading in My Community (presented by speakers who are people with disabilities actively involved in political action and advocacy; taught through the experience of visiting the State Capitol and State Legislature; several states have created very effective State Capitol visits that include meeting in their States' legislative chambers and holding debates between two groups of delegates regarding a current policy issue; also emphasized with a "Mentors Luncheon", which invites community role models to dine and network with the delegates)

## **SECTION II-MORE TRAINING SESSION MODULES**

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In addition to the core YLF curriculum, many excellent, companion learning exercises may be integrated into the YLF program, depending on a lot of different factors. Additionally, current events may require that you revise your planned schedule and address other emerging, relevant issues.

The international crisis, which occurred September 11, 2001, is a clear example. Subsequent to that event, student delegates may express more concern with traveling and more interest in conflict resolution or understanding people of different ethnic backgrounds. These are great learning opportunities if we approach them correctly and integrate them into the YLF program.

A key thing to continue to remember is to only include learning modules, which support the YLF disability culture and leadership philosophy. If your forum experience evolves into primarily a recreational activity, it is truly too far from the purpose of the core program to be a YLF. If it successfully integrates new program components needed by the communities you serve, then it has evolved into an even better YLF than originally envisioned.

## **CREATING ENTHUSIASM AND KEEPING SPIRITS HIGH**

Although it's more of an informal part of YLF, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of creating a positive, enthusiastic atmosphere. We use several techniques to accomplish this.

Most important, all scheduled presenters need to be people who can communicate their passion and enthusiasm. There are many excellent technical presenters who may appeal to adult audiences but may bomb when trying to relate with young people.

Another tool we use is our "spirit squad". Our Program Assistants prepare spirit cheers and use them at the beginning of each large group session. This is helpful to set the tone and as a time-keeping tool to call the group to order. It is important to remember to include all students and to be especially mindful of using cheers, which have meaning for students who are deaf. A typical cheer we use is "We've got spirit, yes we do. We make a difference, how about you!" It is also important to include all delegates in the cheers, using clapping or stomping moves to include students who are deaf.

We also use music to establish an upbeat tone. We record a tape of upbeat songs (such as "oldies" or dance numbers) and play it in the large group meeting room between sessions. This is also effective as a time keeping tool and lets the delegates know when the large group session are about to begin. We also start our opening session with a sign language interpretation of an upbeat song, such as Bon Jovi's "It's My Life".

We also use many techniques to keep the delegates involved in the program. All presenters are introduced and acknowledged by student delegates. Each presentation section is assigned to one of the small groups. Two student delegates introduce each speaker. First, one introduces a fellow student, and then that student introduces the speaker. After the presentation, another student thanks the speaker and presents them with a token gift of appreciation—such as a coffee mug with the YLF name and logo. To facilitate this process, the students meet with the speakers fifteen minutes before their presentation to interview them for information.

## **2. THE STAFF: ORIENTATION AND FACILITATOR’S GUIDE**

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As previously mentioned, in the appendix of this guide is a sample “Facilitator’s Guide to the Program Schedule and Student Delegate Workbook”. It is a companion reference to the student workbook, which gives helpful suggestions for the YLF staff regarding the key training modules in the YLF program.

Because the range of experiences of your volunteer and paid staff will vary, it is very important to hold an effective, mandatory staff orientation session prior to the student delegates arriving at YLF. At the orientation, you need to include the following subjects: an overview of the program; information about issues related to specific disabilities and multi-cultural issues; and logistical information, including plans for emergency and safety evacuation. Your counseling staff will have varying degrees of group facilitation expertise, which is critical to successful small group sessions. Consider having a special training on group facilitation, if necessary. It is also very important to reaffirm to staff providing personal care assistance that YLF is not a medical environment and students need to ask for assistance, and not be offered it inappropriately.

## **3. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (FOR STUDENT DELEGATES)**

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Student delegates receive several important instructional materials to help make their time at YLF a true learning experience. (Naturally, all materials are provided in any alternate formats the students need.)

They receive a copy of the previously mentioned “Program Schedule and Student Delegate Workbook”. This workbook includes a copy of their daily YLF schedule, worksheet exercises for them to complete in their small group discussions, and a “Personal Leadership Plan” for them to complete and use when they return to their communities.

We also compile a comprehensive “Resource Binder” of useful information. These binders include information on goods and services available to people with disabilities, information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and other key legislation, and career oriented information from schools and businesses. They include a list of resourceful Web sites. The information is provided in a 3-ring binder and also on a CD-ROM, and all students receive both formats.

When delegates first arrive at YLF, they are also given a nylon or canvas bag containing promotional and souvenir items from businesses that support the program (including notepads and pens, T-shirts, hats, keychains, calculators, watches and disposable cameras to help them document their YLF experience).

#### **4. PRESS COVERAGE AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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Press coverage of your forum sustains the interest of donors and promotes the principles upon which the forum is based, including that people with disabilities are entitled and determined to lead productive and socially beneficial lives. Two weeks before our forum, we send a press release to all newspapers statewide and to local television and news media. However, planning for press coverage must start months earlier.

We have found that the best time for the press to meet with our student delegates is during more visually interesting parts of the program, including technology demonstrations or our rally and photo session on the steps at the state capitol. Before these events, we ask the Co-Counselors of each small group to identify one or two student delegates who can interact effectively with the press. It is worth noting that the media are especially interested in any delegates from their regions of the state. Targeting press releases to the

communities with student representatives is very effective. They may interview students after they return home from their YLF experience.

## **5. DOCUMENTING THE FORUM (SUMMARY REPORTS AND VIDEOS)**

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Your forum's events should be documented for several reasons, including the creation of promotional materials. In California, we produce a fifteen-minute videotape and a written summary report, which includes photographs. Creating these items requires that staff members record images during the forum with video and still photo cameras. Additionally, at least one person should be responsible for recording notes about forum events as they occur.

The recommended videotape production presents an exciting series of images from the forum (including pictures of all the student delegates). It also includes a brief overview of the purpose of YLF. Shot and edited during the forum, the videotape is shown to the student delegates as a surprise event in the last minutes of the forum's closing session. An open captioned copy is provided to all delegates and staff as they leave the forum. The students and staff use the video to educate the community about YLF and to encourage donors to support it.

A written summary report is printed within six months after the forum and is mailed to the student delegates and staff members to commemorate the forum. It is also used to promote YLF to potential sponsors, donors, and to recruit future delegates. As already mentioned, both the videotape and the summary report become effective tools for promoting the forum to community leaders, news media, potential donors, and staff.

## ***D. AFTER YLF—WHAT NEXT?***

### **1. ACKNOWLEDGING DONORS, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

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Because the success of the forum is so dependent on the volunteer staff, the presenters and the financial donors, it is important to acknowledge them as specifically as possible in any written materials, including the program schedule, summary report, press releases and other promotional materials. Additionally, in California, each speaker receives a souvenir coffee mug with a YLF logo, which is presented by a delegate when they publicly thank the speaker. Financial donors should also be acknowledged with some kind of plaque or souvenir mentioning YLF. And all who contribute to YLF appreciate receiving thank you letters with group photos of the delegates.

### **2. FOLLOWING UP WITH YLF ALUMNI**

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#### **COMMUNICATIONS-**

It is important to maintain follow-up with all of the delegates to insure that the forum is not just a one-time experience, but the beginning of a new kind of learning for the students. Our post-forum communication with the alumni includes several items:

- one month after the forum, we mail alumni the “letter to myself” which delegates complete on the last day of the forum, reminding them of their commitments to further action once back in their local community
- two months after the forum, the forum Chair sends a letter to each delegate, wishing them well and encouraging them to stay in touch. Also included is a copy of the group photo taken during the forum
- the summary report is mailed to each delegate as soon as it is printed, usually within six months of the forum.

We also assist the alumni in producing and distributing a “YLF ALUMNI NEWS” newsletter for all forum alumni. The student alumni are responsible for developing and writing the articles, and we assist with editing, printing and mailing.

In California, in 2002, we are finalizing a formalized follow-up study with our alumni. In the future, we plan on surveying alumni at three different intervals (three, five, and ten years following their forum participation) to gather information that will assist us in assessing the success and effectiveness of our forum and further helping the individuals to reach their goals.

One important thing we discovered in following up with our YLF alumni is that the majority of them have maintained relationships with each other and are continuing to use each other as resources as they seek and reach their career and social goals. It is very exciting to discover that they have really acted upon what we hoped they were learning during the forum.

Alumni have shared with us numerous examples of how they achieved extraordinary academic and career goals and have returned to their communities as advocates for other students with disabilities and as leaders in a variety of community activities. In addition to the remarkable experiences on-site during the forum, finding out about the after forum successes of the alumni makes us even more committed to continuing our Youth Leadership Forum . . . and working to bring the experience to many more youth with disabilities.

### **ADVANCED SESSIONS/REUNIONS-**

We strongly recommend that you consider organizing follow-up sessions/reunions for alumni of your YLF. Such activities strengthen the feeling of camaraderie between alumni and encourage them to keep in touch and use each other as resources. Your activity may be as simple as a pizza party at a local restaurant or as formal as a training or educational workshop.

## **INTERNSHIPS-**

Because a primary goal of YLF is career development, we recommend developing an internship or work experience program for alumni of YLF. In California, we are in the process of connecting our alumni to the National Disability Mentoring Day project (now held each October). You can also encourage them to apply to be part of the Workforce Recruitment Program (administered under the Federal Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, ODEP).

### **3. EVALUATING THE PROGRAM AND STAFF**

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In California, after each forum we have produced, we subsequently slightly modify the program in response to input from the student delegates and staff. We receive this input through a formal written evaluation survey completed on the final day of the program and by convening our YLF Planning Task Force to evaluate the project. It is our assumption that we will continue to do this and continue to improve the program.

In California, it took us more than ten years after hosting our first forum to finalize a formal follow-up study with our alumni. In the future we plan on surveying alumni at three different intervals (three, five, and ten years following the forum) to gather information that will assist us in assessing the success and effectiveness of our forum. The survey we are using is based on excellent surveys developed by several of our colleagues in other YLF States and Territories.

One interesting thing we have discovered in following up with the alumni of our project is that the majority of them have maintained relationships with each other and are continuing to use each other as resources as they seek and reach their career and social goals. It is very exciting to discover that they have really acted upon what we hoped they were learning during the forum.

Alumni have shared with us numerous examples of how they achieved extraordinary academic and career goals and have returned to their communities as advocates for other students with disabilities and as leaders in a variety of community activities. In addition to the remarkable experiences on-site during the forum, finding out about the after forum successes of the alumni makes us even more committed to this project.

#### **4. PRODUCING COMMUNITY/REGIONAL YLFs**

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Our experiences producing statewide forums have emphasized the increasing need to include more students in YLF. The best way to accomplish this is by producing regional forums, which include the basic YLF training modules.

Similar to the original model, a regional forum is targeted for high school juniors and seniors. We suggest you hold this community YLF in a nice hotel, and schedule it for Friday evening through Sunday. In two days and nights, you can still include the core principles of the forum, teach the students about disability culture and history plus introduce them to resources to reach their goals. The format should still include assigning the students to small discussion groups and also convening as a large group for guest presentations. All presenters should still be role models who are adults with disabilities. And students should complete a “Personal Leadership Plan” to assist them when returning home.

Your costs will be reduced for regional forums since you can hold them closer to the students’ geographical residences and for a shorter duration. Additionally, you may assign the students responsibility for their own transportation to and from the site, which will also minimize your need for transportation volunteers and services. We still strongly recommend that you provide all support services, since they are truly part of providing full access for all.

Expanding the YLF model into more communities is a wonderful goal for all States and Territories. And the materials in this manual can provide the basic framework to bring YLF to even more students.