

Youth Leadership Forums

Background of the Program

The purpose of [Youth Leadership Forums \(YLF\)](#) is to improve employment, advocacy, leadership, community participation, and independent living outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities throughout the United States and its territories. The program is based on the replication of the innovative California Model: Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities established in 1992. YLF is dedicated to identifying students with disabilities who have exhibited leadership skills and providing additional training so they can become leaders in their communities.

Why Should a CIL be Involved with a YLF?

What are the reasons that these two programs match so well? The following are a few explanations of why your CIL might want to partner with a YLF:

- Check out their principles. The requirements to label your event a YLF are very closely aligned with the requirements a CIL has for staffing and management of their organizations. YLFs understand, just as CILs do, that the more adults and youth with disabilities are present, the more peer mentoring and modeling young people will experience and learn from.
- Before there was a transition service, there was YLF. Many of the current transition services in CILs can trace their roots to YLFs. YLFs are a roadmap for how a CIL can develop and organize their transition services.
- CILs can carry out all their core services by being involved in YLFs. Here's how!
 - **Independent Living Skills:** You can teach skills during the program that will assist with IL, budgeting, completing job applications, interviews, time management, etc.
 - **Peer Mentoring and Support:** Having staff, facilitators, volunteers, presenters/speakers, and mentors present that are people with disabilities will ensure that peer mentoring takes place. Also, when a group of people around the same age is together for a week, peer to peer mentoring will naturally take place and relationships are built.
 - **Information and Referral:** Throughout the week of presentations a lot of information will be provided. Resource fairs to connect youth with resources in their community, including their local CIL are also conducted.
 - **Individual and Systems Advocacy:** YLF participants learn how to become their own advocate. They discover how to advocate effectively for exactly what they need. As they learn more about the disability community and disability history, participants will also learn how to advocate on a systems level. Many YLF's also have participants set goals for community change when they return home.
 - **Transition:** Participants get a real life experience of independent living throughout the week, including staying in a dorm or other location, using supports such as personal care, etc. This increases their confidence and desire to live on their own in the communities of their choice. Sometimes it even diverts someone that would otherwise be headed for institutional

housing or group homes. YLFs also provide a vision for the future to guide the youth as they work to achieve their goals.

How Can a CIL be Involved?

Since many states have already established YLFs, the first step is to determine if your state has an YLF and what role your CIL may play. Check out [National YLF chapters in your state](#). Then, you can decide which of the following roles work best for your CIL:

- **Sponsor:** You can choose to sponsor a youth's expenses or a certain part of the event. Participation in YLF must be at no cost to youth with a disability, including needed accommodations. If your CIL doesn't have access to a lot of extra resources, this is a great way to be involved and contribute. It also allows you to learn more about the overall YLF process.
- **Presenter:** Throughout the week at YLFs, a number of presentations are available to the youth. These may include: Disability History and Awareness, Advocacy, Peer Mentoring, Transition, and more. CILs are already knowledgeable about these topics and have extensive experience in presenting them. Sharing your expertise in a YLF can be an asset to the program. Since one of the YLF's guiding principles is having presenters who have experienced disability, CIL staff can be a great match.
- **Volunteer:** Volunteers are critical to the success of YLFs. Helping organize, running an activity, leading a conversation, or recycling the trash are all practical tasks needed to make the week function. Volunteers can also begin peer relationships with youth that can continue after the completion of the forum and help link them to the supports and services available at CILs.
- **Partner:** If you want to get more involved with planning, organizing, and running the YLF, become an active partner. It is a big undertaking to host the program. So, having key partners that can assist with the ideas, work, and carrying out the mission is very valuable. Since the IL and YLF philosophy are so closely aligned it can make for a great partnership.
- **Host:** As you make the decision about whether to host a YLF, [review the guidelines to ensure you can carry out the requirements](#).

When deciding to host remember that this program has a road map outlined for you. You do not have to start from scratch. Make sure you follow the resources that are provided at the [National Association of Youth Leadership Forums](#).

To learn more about hosting a YLF, view the [Hosting a YLF in 5 Steps factsheet](#).



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For additional information please contact ILRU at ilru@ilru.org.