

What is Alabama YMCA Youth in Government?

Alabama YMCA Youth in Government Mission

“Democracy must be learned by each generation.”

The YMCA Youth in Government program began over fifty years ago with only a few students. However, in the past few decades, the program has grown to include over 1,500 Alabama youth in the Youth in City, Youth Judicial, and Youth Legislature programs.

In that time, the Youth in Government program has fulfilled its mission of “building a better tomorrow from the youth of today.” It has not only taught participants about their government and present day issues, but it has pushed participants to reach within themselves and make good decisions. It also has taught youth to stand firm in their principles and to be tolerant of other’s beliefs. The graduates of the Youth in Government program have gone on to hold some of the most influential positions in our state and country.

The Alabama YMCA Youth in Government program will continue to strive to increase awareness of contemporary politics, its challenges and solutions. By getting young Alabama citizens involved, we are investing in all that follows. We are helping to create a better, more promising future.

The goals of the program include:

1. Understanding formal and informal government structures;
2. Actively participating in the legislative, judicial, executive, and political processes;
3. Enriching the formal education process with realistic learning experiences;
4. Becoming aware of societal trends and their solutions;
5. Developing confidence in and dedication to the democratic process;
6. Learning participative leadership skills;
7. Appreciation for differing points of view;
8. Gaining/Improving communication skills;
9. Learning accountability and respect for others’ rights;
10. Applying moral and ethical valuing processes to public policy making;
11. Providing career exposure opportunities for teens;
12. Understanding and accepting the concept of “Servant Leadership” over power-based models.

Alabama YMCA Youth in Government Purpose

To prepare outstanding, motivated, high achieving young people for moral and political leadership in the American Democratic Process by providing guidance, training, and experience in the theory and practice of determining public policy.

It is possible to describe in four broad categories the ways in which Youth in Government educates its participants. First, students learn core skills that they can apply to parts of their lives: they learn to conduct research, build organizational leadership, decision-making and problem solving skills, improve their command of language, and learn to better speak, debate, negotiate, compromise, persuade, and listen to others. Second, by discussing real world issues, students learn to think about these issues as well as about state politics. Third, by having to think of viewpoints of others, students learn about other viewpoints, policy ideas and concerns, and research and debate.

The fourth and most important thing Youth in Government does, because of the first three sets of skills are achievable by many other ways, is force students to look into another person's eyes, listen to their concerns, understand their differences, and learn how to still learn through compromise. In many ways, Youth in Government prepares individual participants for life through the development of all these skills, while providing more knowledgeable, open-minded, and civic-focused individuals who care about others.

The YMCA Difference

There are many notable youth leadership programs across the country; however, the YMCA Youth in Government program is distinctly different. Our program is designed to not only provide a challenging academic experience but to guide students in personal development. The program is framed on the four core values of honesty, caring, respect and responsibility. These values create a culture that while academically engaging; ensure that students leave our program with the understanding of interpersonal skills that are necessary to succeed in their future endeavors.

Students have the opportunity to participate in servant leadership. They not only receive procedural training but leadership sessions focused on connecting students to the four core values. Participants in the program can expect to grow personally while debating current issues-this is the YMCA difference.

Alabama YMCA Youth in Government Program History

- ★ The YMCA Youth in Government program began fifty-eight years ago and was first implemented in 1949 with only a few students.
- ★ In the past few decades, the Youth in Government program has grown to include over 1500 Alabama youth per year in both the Youth Judicial and Youth Legislature Programs.
- ★ During this time, the Youth in Government program has fulfilled its mission of “building a better tomorrow from the Youth of today.”
- ★ The Youth in Government Program has not only taught participants about their government and present day issues, but it has pushed participants to reach within themselves and make good decisions.
- ★ The Youth in Government Program has taught youth to stand firm in their principles and to be tolerant of other’s beliefs.
- ★ The graduates of Youth Legislature and Youth Judicial have gone on to hold some of the most influential positions in the state and in the country.
- ★ The Alabama YMCA Youth in Government program will continue to strive to increase awareness of contemporary politics, its challenges and solutions.
- ★ The Youth in Government Program gets the young Alabama citizens involved; therefore, we are investing in the future.
- ★ Not only do the Youth in Government programs promote leadership, responsibility, and values but they also provide opportunities to create relationships with people from all over Alabama.
- ★ YMCA Youth in Government programs are an excellent chance to work with students who have similar beliefs and goals; and build friendships that last a lifetime.

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Alabama YMCA  Youth in Government
Questions most often asked about Government Clubs

...What is a Government Club?

An opportunity for students to become involved in as many phases of state government as possible—legislative, judicial, executive, press, page, and lobbyist.

...What grades may belong?

Grades 9-12

...Is there an affiliation fee?

Yes, there is a \$5.00 fee per student per year. (Or \$3 if registered by October 5, 2007)

...Who may be a member?

Any student who wants to see what it is like to be a government leader, learn about values, leadership and responsibility.

...Who may be an advisor?

Any teacher, parent, or community leader who possesses a strong interest in leading a group of high school aged participants in experiences related to leadership training, personal growth, service to others, and social development. Advisors must be at least 21 years old and approved by the YMCA.

What activities does the YMCA provide for me to get involved?

- Fall Planning Retreat
- Pre-Youth Judicial
- Youth Judicial Officer Training
- Youth Judicial Program
- Youth Legislature District Meeting
- Youth Legislature Officer Training
- Youth Legislature
- YMCA Youth Conference on National Affairs
- YMCA Blue Ridge High School Christian Values Conference

...How can my school get involved?

Read the next page, "Starting a Youth in Government Club", and contact the State Office:

**Britton YMCA
P.O. Box 2336
Montgomery, AL 36102
(334) 269-4362
www.alyig.org**

Alabama YMCA Youth in Government Starting a Youth in Government Club

First, congratulations on wanting to take the step in creating a Youth in Government club! Many caring adults have taken the same step as you are considering. To get started, you need four things:

1. Commitment to the Program

Clubs that have the support of their school or YMCA administrations are more likely to be successful. Three of the biggest challenges advisors have are internal paperwork requirements, securing funding, and arranging transportation. With the support of your administration, these three challenges will be reduced – if not eliminated.

2. Place to Meet

The most successful clubs have regularly scheduled meetings in preparation for Youth Judicial and Youth Legislature. Some delegations meet at their YMCA or school. Others have arrangements to meet at their town hall, community centers, library or even the basement of churches or other non profit organizations.

When trying to secure a meeting place, keep in mind its accessibility and availability. You will want a meeting place your students can easily get to and find.

3. Advisors

An advisor that is dedicated to the program is essential to the success of the group. The advisor should be someone available for the weekly meetings, accessible to students (on students' hours), and able to motivate them.

4. Students

Identifying the students is also very important to the program's success. The ideal students to start a club with are those interested in public policy, government, debating, or law. Although there is no model student for the program, these students generally are most interested – and are the leaders of their schools (which helps with recruitment). The student leaders for your club at the beginning should be outspoken, friendly, and responsible individuals who are willing to work.

It is very important that you speak with the YMCA program staff during the club start-up process. We are here to help you every step of the way. Feel free to call us at any time!

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