

# YOUTH COMPENSATION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Young people bring important knowledge and lived experience to state efforts to improve the youth legal system and should be compensated like all other experts who are at the table. Unlike most State Advisory Group (SAG) members who hold paid positions that enable them to serve on the SAG, youth may actually face the prospect of losing money by attending SAG meetings, as they frequently rely on hourly wages and have to choose between paid work and attendance at State Advisory Group meetings. These young people, however, bring important knowledge, tools, and know-how that is necessary to fulfill the mission of the SAG.



## Why is payment important?

Stipends, travel advances, and other forms of compensation including hourly pay from the SAG make it possible for youth to work with the SAG.

Compensation can also help with retention and recruitment. Serving on a SAG without payment, meanwhile, can become an added barrier on top of whatever else may be going on in a young person's life. Many system-involved youths have little to no support system, and may be facing challenges in housing, income inequality, job limitations, and/or skyrocketing costs of living. Providing even a handful of paid hours a month in recognition of their work can be the difference between keeping the lights on and paying for next week's groceries, or having yet another roadblock thrown their way. In cases where young people are caregivers themselves, stipends can also help ensure that youth are able to pay for care for their dependents during meetings.

## What does compensation look like and what processes does that involve?

Compensation rates vary from state to state. In Idaho, for example, youth receive between \$15 and \$75 per meeting depending on whether it is for the Youth Committee or the full State Advisory Group. To submit payment requests, young people are asked to complete a one-page document with a few simple boxes to check. Pennsylvania, meanwhile, uses a vendor process with a payment of \$12.50 per hour for the time that young people spend working on SAG-related projects. In New York, pay is \$25 per hour for Youth Action Committee meetings and \$150 for attending the longer SAG meetings.

Some states also pay differently based on whether an event is in-person or virtual. In Washington, DC, for example, young people are paid \$25 for 90 minutes of virtual time and \$50 for the same amount of time spent in-person. D.C. sets aside a portion of its Title II dollars each year to compensate youth participants and contracts with a local non-profit with simplified and flexible payment processes to make compensation more youth-friendly.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a longtime leader in youth partnership and compensation, has opted instead for a daily rate as opposed to hourly pay. At Annie E Casey, young people are paid a daily rate of \$350, or roughly \$43 an hour. The foundation does not have a different rate for in-person or virtual events, but they do have a differential for professional development activities versus when they are asking young people to contribute and help inform the foundation's work. The rate for professional development is half the rate for daily contributions, or roughly \$175 per day.



## Other things to consider when paying young people

- Internet and phone stipends are also important to consider. Expenses for phone and internet, which are necessary to attend meetings in a remote world, can be another roadblock since not all young people have access to devices, internet, or phone services.
- When youth SAG members are traveling as part of their duties for the SAG, cash advances are essential. Young people may not have credit cards or other financial means to pay for food, gas, lodging and other expenses up front. SAGs can successfully overcome these obstacles by either providing advances to young people, or ensuring that these costs can be covered by a state credit card at the time they are incurred.
- PayPal and Venmo provide timely payment options to get money in the hands of young people faster than normal check processing options. This is important because young people may be relying on these funds to pay bills immediately. For youth who don't have a bank account, this also ensures that they are not faced with exorbitant fees at check cashing facilities.
- Staff who are working with youth SAG members should be sure to help them understand potential tax implications that stipends and payments may have. Unlike typical employment situations where taxes are taken out upfront, SAG members are often paid as consultants and may need to file and pay taxes on their income at the end of the year. When this occurs and hasn't been properly explained upfront, young people may be left to foot an unexpected bill.
- State Advisory Groups should also be aware of the additional policies that are in place for youth members who are incarcerated. Some facilities have policies that require youth to pay percentages of all the money they receive to cover court costs or restitution.



### Conclusion

Organizations that serve youth and seek to cultivate youth voice must recognize the barriers and roadblocks that hinder youth engagement. Youth members have valued expertise and should be compensated for this expertise and knowledge. Youth members, whether system involved or not, are vital partners in shaping policy. Appropriate compensation ensures that they have the same chance as others who are at the table to give their time and talents to the important work before them.