



Impacting Housing Security for Youth and Young Adults: Explore Vital Advocacy Tools

September 4, 2025



Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority

NATIONAL NETWORK
 for **YOUTH**

collaborate • advocate • transform



TRANSFORM
— CONSULTING GROUP —



Welcome!

- Introduce yourself in chat: Name, pronouns, organization, location, and an emoji of how your day is going so far.



- Ask questions in chat throughout the presentation. We will also have time for discussion throughout and at the end.
- The slides, recording, and a resources document will be shared with you.

About National Network for Youth

**NN4Y is on a mission to
transform systems so that no
young person in America
experiences homelessness.**



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<http://nn4youth.org/>

NN4Y works with youth who have experienced homelessness and youth service providers from across the country to prevent and end youth, young adult, and young parent family homelessness and human trafficking. Together, we envision a future in which all young people have a safe place to call home, with endless opportunities to achieve their fullest potential.

Our Programs

- Federal Policy Advocacy
- Youth + Youth Adult Partnerships
- Community-Based Solutions



Agenda

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The views expressed in this presentation do not reflect those of the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA), the Balance of State Continuum of Care, or any affiliated government entity.



What Is (and Isn't) Advocacy?



What is Advocacy?



Share in the chat:

What is advocacy to you?

Who, what, when, where, why, how?

What is Advocacy?



- ★ **What:** Speaking up, raising awareness, or taking action to support a cause.
- ★ **Who:** Anyone can be an advocate.
- ★ **When:** The time to advocate is now.
- ★ **Where:** Anywhere—in your private circles, on social media, or in public settings.
- ★ **Why:** You have power—no one else knows exactly what you know or has had the same experiences as you. You can't guarantee that anyone else is going to fix the issues you care about.
- ★ **How:** Can include things like storytelling, educating the public, building coalitions, or meeting with decision-makers.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



- ★ **Advocacy:** Speaking up, raising awareness, or taking action to support a cause.
- ★ **Who:** Anyone can be an advocate.
- ★ **Lobbying:** A type of advocacy that is trying to influence a specific piece of legislation.
- ★ **Who:** Not everyone is allowed to engage in lobbying activities.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



Advocacy: Meeting with your lawmaker and sharing information about how many youth experience homelessness and housing insecurity in your community.

Lobbying: Asking your lawmaker to vote yes on a bill that would help youth experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

This is direct lobbying—you are asking your lawmaker directly to do something about a bill.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



Advocacy: Giving a public speech about the challenges you faced while experiencing homelessness.

Lobbying: Asking your audience to support a specific bill, for example, "Call your Senators and tell them to support the Homeless Children and Youth Act!"

This is grassroots lobbying—you are asking others to tell their lawmakers to do something about a bill.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



✓ Who IS allowed to lobby?

- ★ Private citizens
- ★ Lobbyists
- ★ Corporations/Businesses

✗ Who IS NOT allowed to lobby?

- ★ Government entities (public schools, libraries, local government, etc.)

⚠ Who is SOMETIMES allowed to lobby?

- ★ 501(c)(3) Nonprofits: Lobbying activities must be a small part of their work. Nonprofits CANNOT use government funding/grants for lobbying.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



As a youth with lived experience, can I lobby?

✓ **Yes**, as a private citizen and on your own time.

✗ **No**, not as a representative of a Continuum of Care or of IHCD.

⚠ **Probably no**, as a representative of a nonprofit organization.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



Who IS allowed to advocate?

★ EVERYONE!

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



A nonprofit organization that receives federal grants posts on their public social media about the importance of affordable housing options for youth and shares stories from young people.

Is this **ADVOCACY** or **LOBBYING**?

Are they allowed to do this?

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



You meet with a state senator and ask them to vote no on Senate Bill 123, which would decrease access to housing programs.

Is this **ADVOCACY** or **LOBBYING**?

Are you allowed to do this?

Advocacy vs. Lobbying



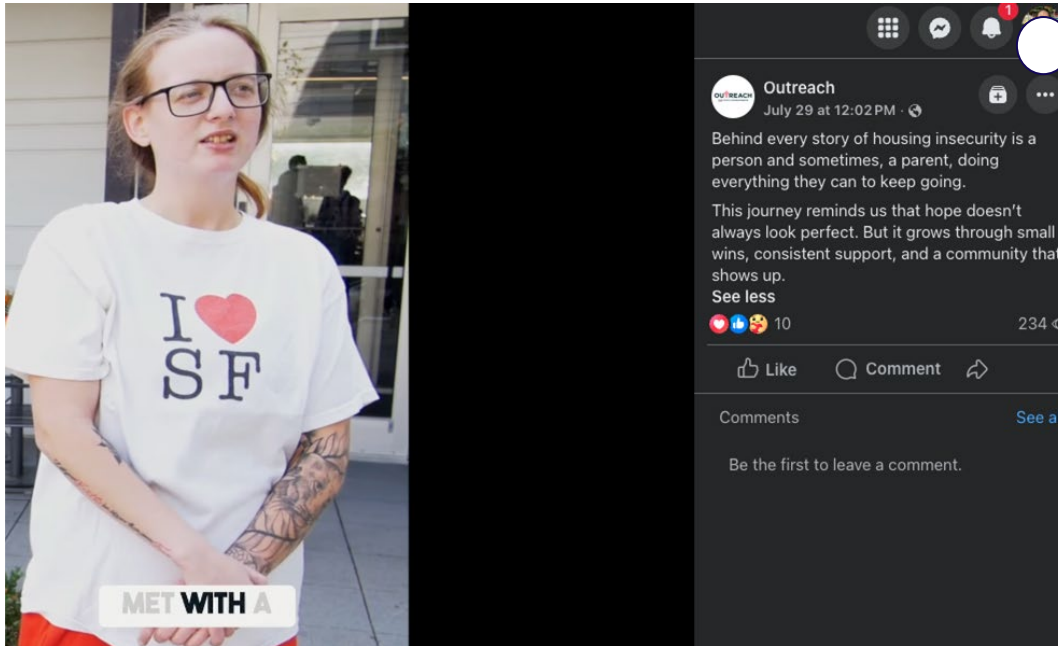
You work at IHCD. Using your work email, you send an email to your friends and family that says: “Help me support youth experiencing homelessness! Call your state Representatives and ask them to vote yes on House Bill 52.”

Is this **ADVOCACY** or **LOBBYING**?

Are you allowed to do this?

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Advocacy



MET WITH A

Successful Advocacy in Indiana:

A youth homelessness provider posts videos featuring lived experts to raise awareness about the pathways to homelessness.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/OutreachIndiana/videos/1258251142445335>

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Advocacy



Successful **Lobbying** in Indiana:

*After an intensive and prolonged advocacy campaign, the Hoosier Housing Needs Coalition (HHNC) defeated three versions of a **bill to criminalize homelessness** in the Indiana General Assembly... Not only did HHNC mobilize its membership of 2,500 individuals to take action, they also partnered with a broad group of allies and stakeholders that included the Indiana Sheriffs Association, Helping Veterans and Families (HVAF), and the Indiana Association of Counties, all of whom **gave public testimony and voiced opposition to the criminalization of homelessness legislation.***

—[Indiana Advocates Successfully Defeat Three Iterations of Homelessness Criminalization Legislation](#)

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Finding Policy Opportunities



What is Policy?



“Policy” is made up of all the official, big and small decisions made by people in power **that affect real lives.**

- ★ The U.S. Congress passes a law to increase funding for youth shelters.
- ★ A local Continuum of Care changes its coordinated entry process to prioritize parenting youth for housing.
- ★ A state agency streamlines the application process for youth housing assistance so it can be completed on a phone.
- ★ A rental assistance program requires youth to provide documentation that’s difficult or impossible for them to get.

Who Makes Policy Decisions?



us **Federal (National):** President, Congress, federal agencies (*Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Education, etc*).

→ Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, Youth Homelessness System Improvement Grants.



State: Governor, state legislature, state agencies.

→ Housing voucher programs, youth homelessness funding.



Local: City council, school board, housing authority.

→ Zoning laws, shelter rules, school resources.

Advocating for Policy Change



Policy decisions are being made all the time. These decisions have a real-life impact.

These decisions don't just “happen.” They're made at meetings, through budgets, during votes, and more.

If you know **when** and **where** decisions are being considered, you can show up, speak out, and organize others to take action. Always be on the lookout for advocacy opportunities.

Resource

How to Use It

Example Opportunity

Government website, such as your city council or state legislature.

Find information on committee meetings, bills that have been introduced, hearings, etc.

The Indiana General Assembly has scheduled a hearing about housing affordability, so you send your state lawmaker information about how this issue affects youth. *(You do not send information about a specific bill---just data and experiences from youth in your community.)*

Email lists/newsletters from youth advocacy organizations, housing coalitions, your federal and state lawmakers, etc.

Get alerts when action is needed and stay in the loop about what's happening in your community.

A local housing coalition launches a campaign about housing insecurity in your area, and shares what social media tags to use. Your YAB posts with the tags to share about how this issue affects youth and to uplift youth experiences.

Public calendars for government bodies.

Stay aware of upcoming meetings or votes.

Your City Council is hosting a budget meeting that is open to the public. One of their agenda items is how much to spend on housing. You sign up to speak at the meeting about how many youth face housing insecurity.

Google Alerts.

Track news about relevant issues.

You receive an alert that your Governor is hosting a town hall meeting in your area. You work with your YAB to prepare a question to understand their stance on youth homelessness.

Advocating for Policy Change



Policy decisions—big and small—are being considered, debated on, and made all the time. These decisions have real impacts on people's lives.

Stay plugged in to what is happening in your state and community so that you can find opportunities to advocate.

Once you have found an opportunity, you will be able to decide on the best strategy.



Pairing Strategy With Opportunity

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What is Advocacy?



★ **What:** Speaking up, raising awareness, or taking action to support a cause.

★ **Who:** Anyone can be an advocate.

★ **When:** The time to advocate is now.

★ **Where:** Anywhere—in your private circles, on social media, or in public settings.

★ **Why:** You have power—no one else knows exactly what you know or has had the same experiences as you. You can't guarantee that anyone else is going to fix the issues you care about.

★ **How:** Can include things like storytelling, educating the public, building coalitions, or meeting with decision-makers.

The Advocacy Cycle

Advocacy does not have a perfect start or finish. It is always evolving and always moving ahead.



Sample Advocacy Strategy



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* [2024 estimates](#) of IN 18-24 population: 672,597; multiply by .1 to represent the Chapin Hall estimates that 1 in 10 18-24 year olds experience homelessness.

** Slide 35

Analyze the issue. *What does the data say?*

- ★ According to [national studies](#) of youth and young adult homelessness, more than 65,000 18-24 year olds* experience homelessness in Indiana each year. This population is most likely to be extremely-low income (ELI). In Indiana, only [16 rental homes](#)** are affordable and available for every 100 ELI households.

Set goals and objectives. *What do you want to change?*

- ★ Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Identify targets. *Who are your allies? Who is opposed? Who has power?*

- ★ Potential allies: Youth with lived expertise, youth service providers, McKinney-Vento school liaisons.
- ★ Potential opposition: Those who don't want to spend more money on government programs.
- ★ Decision-makers include: State lawmakers, CoCs, mayor, private donors.

The Advocacy Cycle

Advocacy does not have a perfect start or finish. It is always evolving and always moving ahead.





An Advocacy Strategy Should:

1. **State the problem.** *What's the issue?*
2. **Share relevant data and give real-world examples.** *Why should your audience care?*
3. **Offer a solution.** *What should we do about the problem?*



Keep it general. *Reduce barriers, prioritize investments, advance solutions, improve coordination...*



Advocacy Strategies Include:

- Emails, letters, or phone calls to elected officials.
- Building coalitions, or groups of people who want to join your advocacy.
- Social media posts to spread the word and raise awareness.
- Organized protests.
- Community roundtables to bring together different community leaders to strategize about issues.
- Meeting with lawmakers to educate them about the issues.



Sample Advocacy Strategy

Your advocacy will be more effective when you align your strategy with relevant policy opportunities.



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Strategic	MORE Strategic
Post stories from youth with lived experience of homelessness on your YAB's social media.	Post stories on your YAB's social media during Youth HOPE Month and using the campaign's hashtags.
Meet with your state lawmakers to educate them about affordable housing options for youth.	Schedule your meeting to take place a few weeks before they are set to vote on a bill about affordable housing.
Invite your Governor to tour a youth program and hear from young people with lived experience.	Host the tour when the Governor's office is putting together its annual budget proposal.

Sample Advocacy Strategy



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If you want to push for change, you first need to know where decisions are being made and when you can show up.

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: Your state lawmaker is working with a local developer and your city council to plan a new apartment complex for low-income renters.

What policy opportunities would you search for to strategically advocate for our goal? How would you find them?

Sample Advocacy Strategy



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When you've found an opportunity, you can decide what strategies are best to take advantage of it.

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex.

What strategies would you use to take advantage of this policy opportunity?



An Advocacy Strategy Should:

1. **State the problem.** *What's the issue?*
2. **Share relevant data and give real-world examples.** *Why should your audience care?*
3. **Offer a solution.** *What should we do about the problem?*



Keep it general. *Reduce barriers, prioritize investments, advance solutions, improve coordination...*



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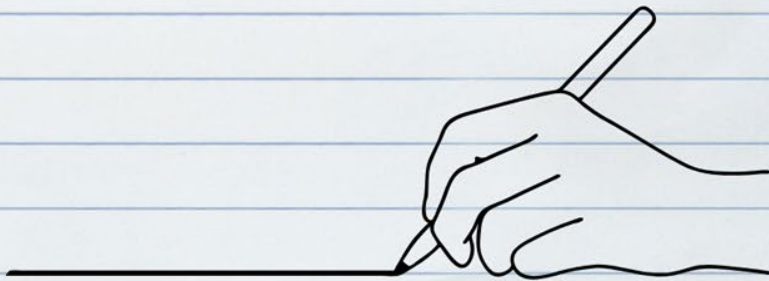
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Strategic Storytelling

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What is Strategic Storytelling?

Strategic storytelling allows you to use a story to connect with others, build partnerships, and achieve your policy goals. As a lived expert, you are a trusted messenger. **Speak your truth to power.**

Strategic storytelling:

- ★ Is an advocacy strategy based in research.
- ★ Uplifts a particular policy goal.
- ★ Strengthens key data points.
- ★ Can be tailored to different audiences.

What is Strategic Storytelling?

✗ Climate change causes sea levels to rise by 0.14 inches each year.

✓ *When I visited my hometown last year, I saw my childhood beach swallowed by the ocean. My neighbor's house—once safely inland—now floods every spring. This isn't just science; it's our lives changing before our eyes, all because of climate change.*

✗ No state has an adequate supply of affordable housing for extremely low-income households.

✓ *Earlier this year, I spoke with Jasmine, a single mom who works full-time and sleeps in her car with her two kids. Every morning, she gets them dressed in a gas station bathroom before dropping them off at school. She has to do this because the rent for a one-bedroom apartment is more than half her income.*

When is Strategic Storytelling Useful?

Meeting with a government official

You're educating them about an issue.

Giving a speech

You're speaking at a rally or event.

Posting on social media

You're raising awareness about youth homelessness.

Writing a publication

You're publishing an op-ed about youth homelessness in your community.

Educating someone about homelessness

You're a featured speaker on a panel.

Giving an interview

You're being interviewed.

Elements of an Effective Story



Set the Stage.

Who, what,
where, when?



Describe the Challenge.

Be specific and aligned
with your goal.



Convey the Struggle.

Use strong adjectives
and details.



Highlight the Turning Point.

What helped?
What changed?



Reach Closure.

Why did you share
that story?

Ways to Say “No”

- ★ I don't feel comfortable sharing that.
- ★ I don't think I'll share that at this time.
- ★ That wasn't part of my experience. What I can say is...



Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



Set the Stage.

Who, what,
where, when?

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

My name is Person, and I am 23 years old. I am from Indianapolis. I first began to experience homelessness when I was 17 and had to leave my family's home due to conflict.

The views expressed in this presentation do not reflect those of IHCD, the Balance of State Continuum of Care, or any affiliated government entity.

See: [Indianapolis unveils affordable housing unit for youth experiencing homelessness](#)

Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



Describe the Challenge.

Be specific and aligned with your goal.

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

I was working a full-time job while also finishing high school, but because the cost of living in Indianapolis is so high, I wasn't able to afford my own place, or even split the cost with a roommate—that is, if I could even find a safe roommate. I had to stay with others until I had no one left to stay with, then I lived in my car.

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See: [Indianapolis unveils affordable housing unit for youth experiencing homelessness](#)

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Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



Convey the Struggle.

Use strong adjectives
and details.

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

This experience was completely dehumanizing, because I was doing everything “right”—I was going to school and working more than 40 hours a week. But I couldn’t sign a lease because I wasn’t 18, and even if I was 18, I couldn’t afford even the cheapest apartment. On top of all this, I didn’t have anyone to help me with my mental health or to ask me if I was okay, or help me get into college or get a better job.

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Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



**Highlight the
Turning Point.**

What helped?
What changed?

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Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

Finally, when I turned 18, I found out about a program in Indianapolis that helps youth under 24 who are experiencing homelessness like how I was. They were able to help me with all the paperwork I needed to get into an apartment that was specifically set aside and made affordable for youth like me. They also made sure I had a case manager who would check in on me, help me do the FAFSA, and help me find other services like healthcare. Now I'm paying my own rent—I've never been late—and I'm enrolled in community college.

See: [Indianapolis unveils affordable housing unit for youth experiencing homelessness](#)

Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



Reach Closure.
Why did you share
that story?

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Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

In Indiana, as many as 65,000 18-24 year olds experience homelessness in each year. Youth-headed households are most likely to be extremely-low income (ELI). In Indiana, we only have 16 rental homes that are affordable and available for every 100 ELI households. Helping youth exit homelessness as soon as possible is key to preventing us from going down the path of chronic homelessness. It's a critical intervention that strengthens our youth today to help them become stable adults in the future. Getting access to an affordable apartment with youth-specific services changed my life. I hope that all youth in a position like I was are given the same opportunity.

See: [Indianapolis unveils affordable housing unit for youth experiencing homelessness](#)

Strategic Storytelling Example

Storytelling



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What about for something short, like social media?

Goal: Highlight the need for more state- and community-wide services that help youth and young adults access affordable housing.

Scenario: The state lawmaker and developer are attending a city council meeting to get feedback on the new apartment complex. You have signed up to speak at the meeting.

Caption or story:

I struggled to exit homelessness because I couldn't afford to live anywhere, even though I had a full-time job. I was doing everything right, but everything was going wrong. Getting connected to services and an affordable apartment that was set aside specifically for youth changed my life. I look forward to attending Monday's @citycouncil meeting with @statelawmaker and @developer to hear about their solutions to help the 65,000 Indiana youth experiencing homelessness get stable housing.

See: [Indianapolis unveils affordable housing unit for youth experiencing homelessness](#)

Strategic Storytelling

Strategic storytelling allows you to use your expertise to connect with others, build partnerships, and achieve your policy goals.

Make sure that the story you share:

- ★ Uplifts a particular policy goal.
- ★ Strengthens key data points.
- ★ Is tailored to your audience.
- ★ Makes the purpose of your advocacy clear, but be aware of when you might be straying into lobbying.

***Use the worksheet in the resource document to draft your story.*



Meeting With Decision Makers

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Meeting with Decision Makers



Meetings with decision makers are one of the most important advocacy strategies. Decision makers—like lawmakers, city council members, or agency leaders—are the ones who control funding, policies, and programs that affect your life.

When you show up to meet with them:

- ★ You make the issue real. Many decision makers haven't heard directly from young people impacted by housing instability.
- ★ You bring a face to the problem. Personal stories are more powerful than statistics.
- ★ You show leadership. Youth-led advocacy proves that young people care, are paying attention, and want to help shape solutions.
- ★ You build relationships. A single meeting can open the door to long-term influence and support.

Meeting with Decision Makers



Planning a Meeting:

1. Decide on your policy goal—this will determine who you should meet with and who should join you.
2. Send a request via email or phone to meet with the decision maker and/or their staff.
3. Prepare talking points and materials for your meeting.
4. After the meeting, send follow-up.

Meeting with Decision Makers



Decide on your policy goal—this will determine who you should meet with and who should join you.

- ★ Questions to ask about your policy goal:
 - What is the issue you want to address?
 - Is this a state-level issue or a local one?
 - Is it an issue with the law, with a regulation, or with a program's rule?
- ★ From there, you can determine the best decision maker to meet with.
- ★ What other stakeholders could join you for this meeting?
 - Organizing is about bringing people together to build power and push for change.
 - Decision makers are more likely to be influenced by a group, instead of just one voice.

Meeting with Decision Makers



Send a request via email or phone to meet with the decision maker and/or their staff.

- ★ Specify who you want to meet with.
- ★ Briefly describe what you want to meet about and who will be attending the meeting.
- ★ Specify how long the meeting will be (usually between 30 minutes to one hour, depending on how many people are attending).
- ★ Specify if it will be in-person or virtual.
- ★ Offer a few dates and times.

***Use the meeting request email template in the resources document.*

Meeting with Decision Makers



Prepare talking points and materials for your meeting.

- ★ Assign a meeting lead, who will start and lead the meeting and send the follow-up.
- ★ Put together a detailed agenda that includes talking points for each speaker.
- ★ Put together fact sheets or other handouts to leave with the decision maker and their staff.
- ★ Have time to check in and practice with your meeting group before the actual meeting.
- ★ **BE PREPARED!** You will be leading the meeting.

***Use the meeting agenda template in the resources document.*

Meeting with Decision Makers

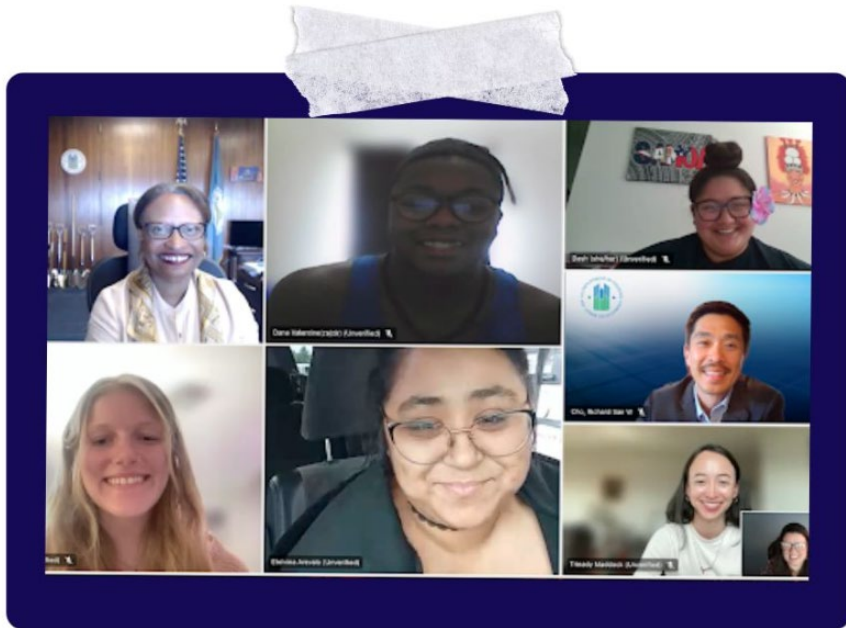


After the meeting, send follow-up.

- ★ This could be something as simple as a thank you email.
- ★ It could also be additional information the decision maker had requested, an invitation to continue your work together, etc.

***Use the follow up email template in the resources document.*

Youth Advocates Met with HUD Secretary



In 2024, NN4Y's National Youth Advisory Council met with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Acting Secretary, Adrienne Todman.

Each advocate used strategic storytelling to share their experiences of homelessness and how they were impacted by HUD's policies over access to housing and supportive services.

Because of their targeted advocacy, HUD included new youth-specific provisions in their subsequent grant application.

Overview

Wrap Up

★ **Advocacy vs. Lobbying**

- Advocacy is raising awareness or speaking generally about a policy issue. Lobbying is asking someone to take action on a specific piece of legislation.

★ **Find Policy Opportunities**

- Be aware of who is making housing decisions in your state and community, and when these decisions are being discussed and made.

★ **Pair Advocacy Strategies With Opportunities**

- Pick one or more advocacy strategies that help you take advantage of opportunities in your community. Your advocacy strategies will always be evolving.

★ **Speak Your Truth to Power With Strategic Storytelling**

- Sharing your experience is more persuasive than data alone. You can tailor your story to fit your policy goal, your strategy, and your audience.

★ **Meet With Decision Makers**

- Meetings are one of your most powerful advocacy strategies. Make sure decision makers know who you are and what your policy goals are.

Questions/Discussion



WHAT IS A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD (YAB)?

Group of young people brought together by an organization or initiative

- Seek to connect and unite youth under a common cause
- Elevate youth voice
- Allow youth perspective to drive decision making
- Provides professional development for youth
- Connects youth to their community and resources



Bos CoC YAB Mission:

- The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), in partnership with the Indiana Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoS CoC), provides youth and young adults (YYA) the opportunity to have a voice for those experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. The Youth Advisory Board's (YAB) mission is to create a space for youth and young adults to advocate, engage, and participate in decisions directly impacting YYA housing throughout Indiana.

Apply Now!

YAB is seeking members. To learn more, please contact Megan Hershey, Project Consultant at m.hershey@transformconsultinggroup.com







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Committed to Housing Every Hoosier

ihcda 
Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority



FUTURE TRAINING TOPICS

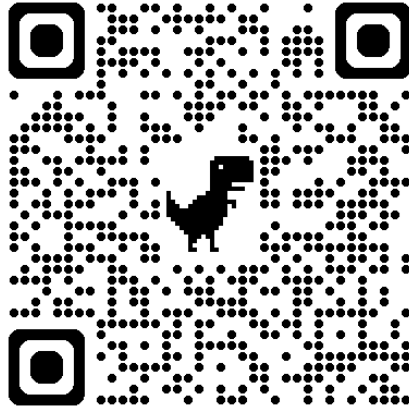
-  Building Strong Youth Advisory Boards: January 2026
-  Intergenerational Collaboration: April 2026
-  Housing Life Skills: August 2026
-  Housing and Health: December 2026

[IHCDA Youth Program](#)



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**Please Share Your Feedback
Using [This Survey!](#)**



Together, we can
prevent and
**end youth
homelessness.**

ihcda 

Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority



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