CONNECTICUT YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION

A practical, people-centered guide for Connecticut Youth Service Bureau leaders and staff.

Developed by the Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA) to support learning, collaboration, and connection across the YSB network.

# YSB Handbook

Orientation and Reference Guide for Connecticut YSB Professionals

Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA)
2025

Dear Youth Service Bureau Leader,

Welcome, and thank you for stepping into this essential work. Whether you're new to your role or simply looking to deepen your knowledge, we're so glad you've found your way to this handbook.

This resource was created by the Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA) as a practical, human-centered guide for anyone involved in leading or supporting a Youth Service Bureau (YSB). While many sections are geared toward individuals in day-to-day leadership positions, we also designed this tool to be useful for team members, emerging professionals, board members, and community partners looking to better understand the YSB model and its impact across the state.

We know that no two YSBs look exactly alike, just as no two roles within them are identical. Whether you're a manager, assistant director, supervisor, or in another leadership role, our hope is that this handbook becomes a go-to reference for the questions that come up in the work. From navigating grant requirements and partnerships to understanding core values and youth development strategies, the content here is meant to support you as you grow into this work over time.

The structure is designed for flexibility, you can jump to the sections you need, explore tools and templates, and come back to different areas as your role evolves. Throughout the handbook, we've included insights from the field, real reflections from experienced YSB professionals to help you feel connected to a broader community of leaders who are walking alongside you.

Thank you for your commitment to young people, families, and communities. The work of YSBs is often quiet but transformative, and your leadership plays a vital role in its success. CYSA is here to support you every step of the way.

With gratitude,

**The Connecticut Youth Services Association Board of Directors**

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# Orientation: CYSA, Chapter, and Purpose

## What is CYSA and What Do We Do?

The Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA) is the statewide network representing Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) across Connecticut. Established over 40 years ago, CYSA currently supports a unified network of over 100 YSBs serving 137 towns

Our Mission:
Connecticut Youth Services Association leads, strengthens, supports and advocates on behalf of a unified network of Youth Service Bureaus dedicated to the well-being of Connecticut's youth and families.

What We Do:

- **Leadership & Advocacy**
  CYSA represents YSBs at the state level, supporting them in securing legislative funding and influencing policy to advance prevention and youth development goals across Connecticut

- **Capacity Building & Networking**
  Through training, technical assistance, resource sharing, and a collaborative community of practice, CYSA helps member organizations strengthen their effectiveness and expand their impact

- **Knowledge Generation & Tools**
  CYSA develops and curates position papers, best practices, data reports (like the YSB Landscape Analysis), technical briefs, and program toolkits designed specifically for YSB staff and volunteers

- **Support for Core ACU Functions**
  CYSA provides specialized guidance and resources for the five Administrative Core Unit (ACU) functions required by statute:
  – Community Involvement
  – Resource Development
  – Research & Assessment
  – Advocacy
  – Management & Administration

CYSA is the anchor support system for YSBs in Connecticut, guiding their advocacy, helping build their capacity, and equipping them with tools and connection. By strengthening every bureau, CYSA uplifts the collective impact of youth-serving efforts across our state.

Board meetings are held the second Thursday of every month from 10:00am - 12:00 noon via Zoom. All Board meetings are open, and members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

CYSA By-laws: https://www.ctyouthservices.org/Customer-Content/WWW/CMS/files/CYSA_Amended_By_Laws_2013.pdf

## CYSA Chapters

Connecticut is home to **7 CYSA regional chapters**, each bringing together Youth Service Bureau professionals from neighboring towns to foster connection, coordination, and shared learning.

Each chapter designates one of its members to serve as that region's official representative on the CYSA Board of Directors, helping ensure that local voices are reflected in statewide decisions.

In addition to being a hub for communication and collaboration, regional chapters:

- **Offer mentorship opportunities** for emerging YSB leaders
- **Facilitate peer support** and professional development
- **Serve as a valuable resource** for sharing tools, strategies, and updates across bureaus

Whether you're new to YSB leadership or looking to stay informed on emerging issues, your chapter is a great place to build relationships, ask questions, and stay connected to the broader CYSA network.

Click here to see the Chapter Regions Map

## Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook was created to support new and emerging leaders within Connecticut's Youth Service Bureaus by offering a clear, centralized, and accessible guide to the work. Whether you're stepping into a leadership position, supporting a team, serving on a board, or simply looking to better understand the YSB model, this resource is for you.

Inside, you'll find foundational knowledge, practical tools, and reflections from the field, all designed to help you feel informed, prepared, and connected. From onboarding tips and grant reporting to youth engagement strategies and prevention programming, this guide is here to support you throughout your journey.

You don't need to read it cover to cover. Each section is self-contained and easy to navigate, allowing you to:

- Jump to what's relevant now
- Explore practical tools and templates
- Return to key sections as your role evolves
- Reuse and adapt documents for your own bureau's needs

Whether you're problem-solving in the moment or planning for the future, this handbook is a tool you can come back to again and again. Our goal is to make this resource not only useful, but *human*, grounded in real experiences and shared wisdom from across the YSB network.

It's also designed for ease of use: every page includes a "Return to Table of Contents" link in the footer, making it simple to navigate and revisit key sections anytime.

## What is a Youth Service Bureau (YSB)?

Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) are community-based organizations that play a vital role in Connecticut's system of care for youth and families. Their mission is to support the positive development of children and youth, prevent problems before they escalate, and strengthen families through coordinated services, outreach, and engagement.

YSBs are designed to be responsive to local needs, often serving as a hub for prevention, early intervention, and community connection. No two bureaus look exactly alike, but all share a common goal: helping young people thrive.

### Core Values of YSBs

YSBs across the state are rooted in three key values that guide their work:

- **Prevention**
  Proactively addressing challenges before they escalate whether through substance use prevention, mental health supports, or family-focused education.

- **Positive Youth Development**
  Creating opportunities for young people to build skills, form connections, and discover their strengths through meaningful programs and relationships.

- **Family Support**
  Recognizing that young people don't grow in isolation, YSBs partner with families to offer resources, guidance, and support systems that strengthen the entire household.

### Statutory Definition

YSBs are formally defined in Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10-19m, which outlines their purpose, core service areas, and eligibility for state funding.

Read the full statute here

This statute also establishes the five **Administrative Core Unit (ACU)** functions that every YSB must address: Community Involvement, Resource Development, Research and Assessment, Advocacy, and Management and Administration. These are explored in more depth later in the handbook.

### YSBs' Unique Role in Connecticut

Connecticut is the only state in the nation with a statutorily established YSB system, a model that empowers communities to tailor prevention and intervention services to the specific needs of their youth.

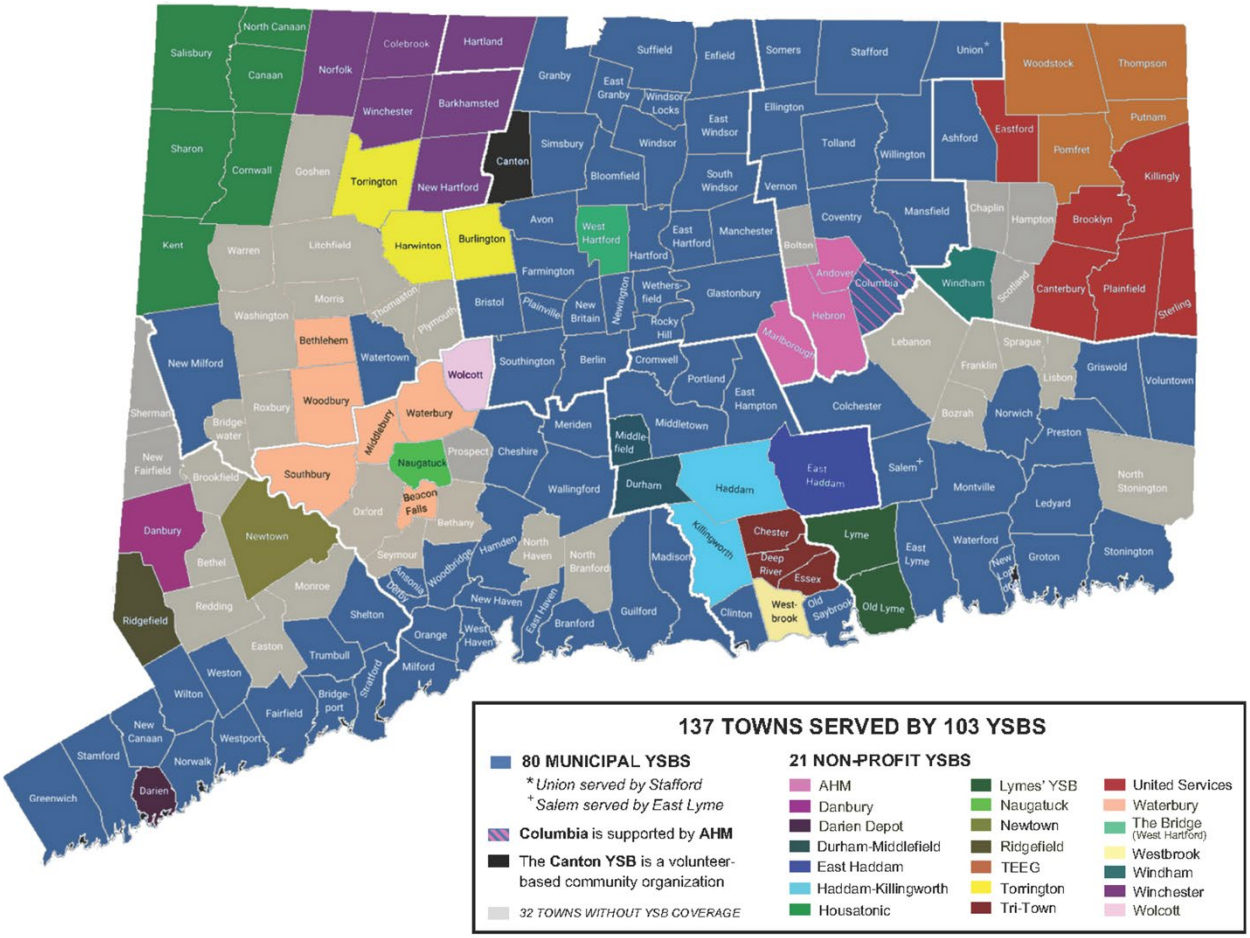
YSBs act as bridges between schools, families, law enforcement, behavioral health systems, and local government. They are often the first point of contact for struggling youth and their families, and they offer a rare blend of flexibility, collaboration, and responsiveness in meeting community needs.

With over 100 bureaus serving 137 towns, Connecticut's YSB network is a model of local innovation connected through a strong statewide backbone, one that prioritizes youth voice, equity, and support systems that evolve alongside the young people they serve.

## YSB Structures: Municipal vs. 501(c)(3)

Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) in Connecticut operate under two primary structural models: **municipal departments** and **nonprofit 501(c)(3)** organizations. Both models fulfill the same statutory purpose, to promote the well-being of youth and families through prevention, intervention, and positive youth development. They do differ in how they are governed, staffed, and funded. Currently, there are 80 municipal YSBs and 21 non-profit YSBs: AHM, Danbury, Darien Depot, Durham-Middlefield, East Haddam, Haddam-Killingworth, Housatonic, Lymes' YSB, Naugatuck, Newtown, Ridgefield, TEEG, Torrington, Tri-Town, United Services, Waterbury, The Bridge (West Hartford), Westbrook, Windham, Winchester, and Wolcott.

(See map on next page for additional information)




## Overview of Each Model

**Municipal YSBs**
Operate as departments or divisions within a town or city government, often housed under Human Services, Youth & Family Services, or Health & Social Services. These bureaus are part of the municipal structure, meaning staff are town employees and budgets are approved through the local government process.

**501(c)(3) YSBs**
Operate as independent nonprofit organizations with their own boards of directors. They are mission-driven entities that must maintain nonprofit compliance and can fundraise, apply for a wider array of grants, and develop partnerships across multiple sectors or towns.

### Governance, Budget, and Staffing Differences

| Category | Municipal YSB | 501(c)(3) YSB |
|---|---|---|
| **Governance** | Overseen by municipal officials or a local commission | Governed by a nonprofit board of directors |
| **Budget Process** | Integrated into the town budget; subject to annual municipal approval | Independently managed with multiple revenue sources (grants, donations, contracts) |
| **Staffing** | Town employees, following municipal HR policies and pay scales | Nonprofit employees, governed by internal HR policies and compensation structures |
| **Grants & Funding** | May access municipal funds and state/federal grants | Eligible for broader funding, including private foundations and donor contributions |
| **Oversight** | Reports to a municipal leader or department head | Reports to the board; may also maintain local advisory groups |

### Pros and Challenges of Each

**Municipal YSBs – Advantages**

- Built-in infrastructure for HR, finance, IT, and legal services
- Stable funding through the town budget and less dependency on fundraising
- Strong connections with other municipal departments (e.g., schools, police, social services)
- Job stability and benefits for staff

**Municipal YSBs – Challenges**

- Slower decision-making due to government processes ("red tape")
- Limited flexibility in programming or funding outside municipal priorities
- Subject to political shifts, municipal budget cycles and potential budget cuts which can impact program planning and staffing stability.

*Director insight:* "You have a town behind you for support, but it can also be a con, as it can slow down progress."

**501(c)(3) YSBs – Advantages**

- Greater autonomy to shape programs and respond quickly to community needs
- Ability to expand funding through grants, donations, and fundraising events
- Freedom to define mission, branding, and partnerships beyond municipal borders
- Opportunity to serve regional populations across multiple towns

- Some non-profits also maintain endowment funds or reserve accounts that help ensure program continuity and staff security during funding fluctuations.

**501(c)(3) YSBs – Challenges**

- Must create and maintain all operational policies and compliance systems (IRS, audits, HR)
- Responsible for their own administrative infrastructure and overhead costs
- Like municipalities, may face budget constraints or funding shifts that impact staffing and service delivery
- Benefit structures can vary widely and are often shaped by the organization's size, budget, and capacity, making direct comparisons to municipal systems difficult

Director insight: "Nonprofits can plan strategically without being governed by a whole municipal system, but that freedom comes with the constant need to sustain funding."

YSB Directors describe the two structures as "apples and oranges when it comes to funding." While municipal YSBs benefit from predictable budgets and integrated town resources, 501(c)(3)s enjoy the agility and flexibility to innovate, diversify funding, and tailor services. Neither model is inherently better, each reflects the community's history, local government culture, and the YSB's vision for impact.

Ultimately, strong partnerships with town officials, schools, and community stakeholders are what ensure success, regardless of structure.

## Understanding ACUs (Administrative Core Units)

### What are ACUs, and Why They Matter

Every Youth Service Bureau in Connecticut operates under the **Administrative Core Unit (ACU)** framework. The ACU defines **five essential functions** every YSB must demonstrate: **Community Involvement, Resource Development, Research and Assessment, Advocacy, and Management & Administration.**

Together, these areas ensure YSBs are responsive to community needs, sustainable in their operations, data-informed, and aligned with statewide youth development goals.

In essence, the ACU is your YSB's blueprint for accountability, quality, and impact.

### The Five ACU Functions

**1. Community Involvement**

Community involvement means engaging the very people who are impacted by your programs; youth, families, schools, and community leaders in shaping and delivering services. It's about co-creating solutions and strengthening the web of support around young people

**Core Activities**

- Maintain a **Youth Service Bureau Advisory Board** and **Youth Advisory Board**.
- Facilitate broad-based participation in planning, needs assessment, and program development.
- Raise awareness of the YSB's mission and services across all sectors.
- Identify and collaborate with "power brokers," cultural leaders, and partners.

**Key Skills**

- Group facilitation, community psychology, mediation, and mobilization.
- Deep knowledge of community demographics, influencers, and systems.

*Community involvement transforms programs from "for" youth into programs "with" youth.*

**2. Resource Development**

Resource development is about building the relationships and systems that sustain your work long-term. It hinges on collaboration, creativity, and credibility

**Core Activities**

- Develop and maintain a network of individuals and institutions that can provide funding, expertise, or in-kind support.
- Identify community partners, attend civic and business events, and follow up with new contacts.
- Write grants, coordinate fundraising efforts, and document leveraged resources (volunteers, partnerships, donations).

**Best Practice Tips**

- Always follow through, send thank-yous, updates, and progress reports.
- Diversify funding sources to strengthen sustainability.

*Relationships are your most renewable resource.*

**3. Research and Assessment**

Strong YSBs use data to drive decisions. A **needs assessment** helps identify the real issues facing youth and families and provides the rationale for programs, funding, and advocacy

**Core Activities**

- Conduct or update community needs assessments regularly.
- Gather data from multiple sources: schools, hospitals, police, youth surveys, and local agencies.
- Identify service gaps and use data to guide strategic planning.
- Share findings with the community to build collective action.

**Components of a Strong Needs Assessment**

- Demographics and youth population statistics.
- Data on youth crime, mental health, and substance use.
- Resource directories and service inventories.
- Youth and family input through surveys or forums.
- An *action component* linking needs to solutions, partners, and funding.

**Methods**

- Student surveys (grades 7–12).
- Focus groups or interviews with youth and service professionals.
- Community forums using participatory methods like the Nominal Group Process.

*Data collection is not just compliance; it's storytelling with numbers.*

**4. Advocacy**

Advocacy is at the heart of the YSB mission. It means speaking up for youth, both **individually** and **systemically**

**Core Activities**

- Advocate for individual youth in settings like schools, courts, or family meetings.
- Engage in **systems advocacy** to change policies and structures that affect youth outcomes.
- Promote legislation, funding, and practices that support youth and family well-being.
- Collaborate with CYSA and other state networks to amplify youth and community voices.

**Balancing Advocacy Roles**
YSB staff often navigate the tension between **individual** and **system** advocacy. Advocating strongly for one student may strain relationships with systems needed for broader reform. Effective advocates maintain diplomacy, credibility, and a deep understanding of the systems they seek to change.

*Advocacy is both a microphone and a bridge; it amplifies voices and connects systems.*

**5. Management & Administration**

This function is the operational backbone of every YSB, encompassing leadership, personnel, fiscal management, compliance, and planning

**Core Components**

- **Personnel Management:** Hiring, supervision, evaluations, and staff development.
- **Board Development:** Supporting advisory or governing boards with training, planning, and evaluation.
- **Strategic Planning:** Assessing agency strengths, setting measurable goals, and tracking progress.
- **Grantsmanship:** Identifying needs, developing proposals, and managing awards.
- **Fiscal Management:** Budget creation, defense, and monitoring throughout the fiscal year.
- **Policy & Procedure Development:** Maintaining written HR, fiscal, and operational policies.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Meeting state YSB definitions and licensing standards (when applicable).
- **Marketing & Communications:** Promoting the YSB's work to funders, partners, and the public.
- **Program Monitoring & Evaluation:** Regularly reviewing outcomes, data, and impact.

**Key Practices**

- Create internal systems that support transparency and accountability.
- Engage staff in continuous quality improvement.
- Maintain an "ACU binder" or digital folder organized by the five functions for easy reporting.

*Strong management doesn't just run programs; it builds trust and ensures longevity.*

### ACU FAQs for New YSB Leaders

**How does the ACU relate to state funding?**
A valid ACU is required for official YSB designation and eligibility for DCF Grant-in-Aid funds.

**How often should it be updated?**
ACUs are reviewed annually, but documentation should be maintained throughout the year.

**What if we don't meet all five areas?**
DCF and CYSA provide technical assistance. The goal is continuous improvement, not perfection.

**Who can help?**
Your **regional CYSA representative** and **DCF liaison** can guide you through the ACU review process and share examples of successful submissions.

**Where do I start as a new director?**

1. Review your ACU performance.
2. Create a digital "ACU Hub" folder organized by the five areas.
3. Begin documenting meeting minutes, outreach efforts, funding applications, and data reports in real time.

**Why the ACU Matters Beyond Compliance**

The ACU isn't just a requirement, it's a living reflection of your bureau's mission, values, and evolution. It's how YSBs demonstrate the unique balance of **prevention, advocacy, and collaboration** that defines the field.

When done well, the ACUs become more than paperwork, it's a story of how your community shows up for its youth.

## Getting Started as YSB Leadership

### The First 90 Days: What to Do, Learn, and Prioritize

The first three months in a YSB leadership role set the tone for your tenure. These weeks are about listening, learning, and laying a strong foundation for relationships and systems that will sustain your work.

**0–30 Days: Listen and Learn**

- **Meet your people.** Schedule one-on-one introductions with staff, board/advisory members, school administrators, and town officials.
- **Understand your structure.** Review whether your YSB operates as a *municipal department* or *501(c)(3)* and what that means for HR, finance, and reporting.
- **Review the essentials.** Read your most recent YSB grant application, most recent needs assessment, and budget narrative.
- **Observe programs.** Attend groups, outreach events, and community meetings to see the YSB's work firsthand.
- **Ask questions.** Learn what's working, what's challenging, and where staff and partners see opportunity.
- **Connect with DCF and CYSA.** Reach out to your DCF liaison and CYSA regional representative; they're invaluable guides and your CYSA regional rep can help connect you with a mentor.

**31–60 Days: Organize and Orient**

- **Map your networks.** Identify key partners, schools, police, social services, youth coalitions, faith groups, and civic organizations.
- **Assess systems.** Review policies, fiscal procedures, and data collection methods for compliance and improvement opportunities.
- **Clarify communication.** Establish how staff share updates, report outcomes, and coordinate outreach.

**61–90 Days: Plan and Prioritize**

- **Set early goals.** Identify 2–3 achievable priorities that align with ACU functions.
- **Engage youth voice.** Re-activate or refresh your Youth Advisory Board.
- **Strengthen visibility.** Review branding, social-media presence, and outreach materials.
- **Prepare your first presentation.** Whether to the town, board, or community partners, share your vision and early observations.

**Pro Tip:** Start an "ACU Journal." As you attend meetings or make decisions, note which ACU function it connects to, you'll thank yourself at reporting time.

## Sample Onboarding Checklist

| Category | Task | Status |
|---|---|---|
| **Administrative** | Review policies, personnel files, and organizational chart | ☐ |
| | Access shared drives and key passwords (DCF portal, CTGMS, etc.) | ☐ |
| **Financial** | Review current budget and fiscal procedures | ☐ |
| | Meet with town finance or fiscal agent | ☐ |
| **Community** | Attend one local coalition or prevention council meeting | ☐ |
| | Meet superintendent, police chief, and First Selectman/Mayor | ☐ |
| **Programmatic** | Observe at least one direct-service program | ☐ |
| | Review program outcomes and evaluation tools | ☐ |
| **Board Relations** | Meet with Advisory Board chair and members | ☐ |
| | Schedule first board report or presentation | ☐ |
| **Training & Support** | Connect with CYSA regional rep and DCF liaison | ☐ |
| | Join CYSA listserv and attend next CYSA meeting | ☐ |

## Common Acronyms and Terms Cheat Sheet

This glossary highlights commonly used acronyms across Youth Service Bureau (YSB) operations, partnerships, and statewide prevention initiatives. It focuses on programmatic, structural, and system-level terms frequently encountered in YSB work.

| Acronym | Definition |
|---|---|
| **ACU** | Administrative Core Unit; the five functional areas defining YSB operations. |
| **ARPA** | American Rescue Plan Act; federal funding source supporting community programs. |
| **CAC** | Community Action Council; community-based advisory or collaborative group. |
| **CHEC** | Coalition for a Healthy & Empowered Community. |
| **CMHF** | Community Mental Health Fund. |
| **CTF** | Children's Trust Fund. |
| **CYSA** | Connecticut Youth Services Association; the statewide association supporting YSBs. |
| **DCF** | Department of Children and Families; state agency that funds and oversees YSBs. |
| **DFC** | Drug-Free Communities (federal grant program). |
| **DMHAS** | Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. |
| **DS** | Direct Services; services provided directly to youth and families by staff. |
| **ECE** | Early Childhood Education. |
| **FLTF** | Family Legacy Trust Fund. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **FRC** | Family Resource Center; school-based family and youth support program. |
| **FWSN** | Family With Service Needs; court referral category for youth exhibiting risk behaviors. |
| **IEP** | Individualized Education Plan; developed for students with special education needs. |
| **JRB** | Juvenile Review Board; community-based diversion program for first-time youth offenders. |
| **LGP** | Local Governance Partnership. |
| **MHFA** | Mental Health First Aid; training to identify and respond to mental health crises. |
| **OEC** | Office of Early Childhood; state agency supporting early childhood programs. |
| **POW** | Power of Words; youth empowerment or leadership program model. |
| **PTTC** | Prevention Technology Transfer Center; national training and technical assistance network. |
| **QPR** | Question, Persuade, Refer; suicide prevention gatekeeper training. |
| **RBA** | Results-Based Accountability framework; a data-driven approach to measuring outcomes. |
| **RBHAO** | Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization; regional prevention and behavioral health network. |
| **SEA** | Social Enterprise Accelerator; funding or capacity-building program for nonprofits. |
| **SEL** | Social Emotional Learning. |
| **SMART** | Self-Management and Recovery Training. |
| **SOAR** | Service, Opportunity, Achievement, Resilience (youth leadership or recovery group). |
| **SOR** | State Opioid Response; federal grant supporting substance use prevention and treatment. |
| **SPF** | Strategic Prevention Framework; model guiding data-driven prevention planning. |
| **SRBI** | Scientific Research-Based Interventions; education framework for student support. |
| **YDT** | Youth Diversion Team; multidisciplinary team providing alternatives to arrest for youth. |
| **YSB** | Youth Service Bureau; municipal or nonprofit agency providing prevention, intervention, and youth development programs. |

*Note: This glossary is not exhaustive. YSBs work closely with many partners across social services, public health, and education, each with their own terminology. Directors are encouraged to build a local acronym list as part of their onboarding and partnership development.

## Supervision, Boundaries, and Self-Care

Leadership in a YSB requires balancing compassion with capacity. Directors wear many hats; administrator, mentor, advocate, crisis responder and without healthy boundaries, burnout is inevitable.

**Reflective Supervision**
Reflective supervision is a structured conversation between supervisor and staff focused on professional growth, stress management, and learning.

- Hold scheduled one-on-ones at least monthly.
- Use sessions to celebrate successes, process challenges, and identify training needs.
- Keep notes on goals and progress for ACU documentation.

**Building a Culture of Support**

- Encourage open communication and peer check-ins.
- Create opportunities for staff recognition and team connection.
- Participate in CYSA director roundtables or chapter meetings, these are essential for perspective and camaraderie.

**Maintaining Boundaries and Balance**

- Block dedicated time each week for administration and planning, don't let urgent tasks erase strategic work.
- Set clear availability expectations with staff and partners.
- Model self-care: use vacation time, take breaks, and practice what you promote.

*You can't pour from an empty cup. A supported leader sustains a strong bureau.*

## Where to Find Help and Support

**CYSA**

- Visit ctyouthservices.org for resources, templates, and training updates.
- Join the **CYSA Listserv** to stay informed and connect with peers statewide.
- Contact your **Regional CYSA Representative** for mentoring and technical assistance.

**DCF Youth Service Bureau Liaisons**

- Provide guidance on ACU compliance, fiscal requirements, and grant reporting.
- Offer feedback on ACU documentation and help interpret policy changes.

**Peer Support Network**

- Most directors are eager to help new colleagues, reach out via the CYSA listserv or at quarterly meetings.
- Consider "shadowing" another YSB Director for a day.

**Professional Development Opportunities**

- CYSA Annual Conference and regional trainings.
- DCF Youth Bureau meetings.
- Prevention conferences and PTTC workshops.

**You're not alone.** The YSB network is built on collaboration. Reach out early and often, it's the best way to thrive in your new role.

## YSB Grant

Each year, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) allocates funding to designated Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs). This funding supports the coordination of comprehensive services for youth and families, aligned with the five Administrative Core Unit (ACU) functions. The funding is aligned in three separate line items, the main grant, enhancement grant and the supplemental grant.

DCF funding is not competitive, but it is conditional. To receive and maintain eligibility, YSBs must:

- Perform the five Administrative Core Unit (ACU) functions.
- Submit all required reports on time, and
- Demonstrate compliance with DCF and local policies.

### Application and Timeline of Payments

Application Process

1. Annual Renewal:
   Each YSB must an annual grant packet which includes an online application with upload of Advisory Board Composition Report, Budget Projections and Impact Plan
2. Eligibility Verification:
   DCF reviews the submission to ensure compliance with statutory and ACU standards.
3. Grant Award Notification:
   Upon approval, a formal Award Letter or Contract is issued to the municipality or nonprofit fiscal agent.

4. Fund Disbursement:
   Funds are typically disbursed on a quarterly schedule based on state timelines.

*__Note:__ Typically municipal YSBs receive payments directly to their town finance department. 501(c)(3) YSBs receive payments to their agency account, managed under nonprofit fiscal policies.

### **Typical Timeline** (Subject to Change)

| Month | Milestone |
|---|---|
| **May** | DCF releases annual grant packet which includes an online application with upload of Advisory Board Composition Report, Budget Projections and Impact Plan |
| **June** | DCF reviews applications and issues confirmations |
| **July** | First disbursement (dependent on state budget release) |
| **October, December, April** | Quarterly reporting and/or payments continue as scheduled |

***Always check the most recent DCF guidance and CYSA announcements for updated deadlines*.**

### Reporting Due Dates and Requirements

YSBs are responsible for submitting documentation that demonstrates compliance and progress toward ACU goals. Typical reporting includes:

| Report Type | Due Date | Purpose / Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **End-of-Year Report** | June | Provides program outcomes, data, and success stories |
| **Financial Reconciliation** | September 30 | Documents actual expenditures compared to budget |
| **Data Reports** | Quarterly | Provides information on specific data points and provides state-level reporting |

**Additional Reporting:**
Some YSBs with special projects (e.g., JRB, YDT, or prevention grants) may have separate reports due to DCF, DMHAS, or other funders. Always maintain a reporting calendar to track multiple deadlines.

*Pro Tip: Sync your annual reporting with your board and fiscal year calendar to streamline reviews and approvals.*

**Board and Other Requirements**

To remain in good standing as a YSB, bureaus must meet the following structural and governance requirements:

- Active Advisory Board:
  Maintain an active board, as outlined in Connecticut General Statutes §10-19m–§10-19p as follows:
  (1) The Advisory Board shall be comprised of representatives from public agencies with statutory responsibility for youth and private sector organizations representing community social institutions. These representatives shall include at least one member who is under 21 years of age at the time of appointment, one member who is a representative of the school system, one member who is a representative of the police department, and one member who is a representative of a private youth serving agency. The youth and police representatives may be liaison, non-voting members of the Board if such representatives are not electors in the town. At least one-third of the total membership shall be individuals who are interested in youth services and who receive less than fifty percent of their income by delivering services to youth.

  (2) The Advisory Board of a Bureau involving two or more municipalities shall have at least one duly appointed representative from each municipality.

  (3) Upon the request of the chief elected official of the municipality, the Department may waive the size and composition requirements for an Advisory Board if the composition of the commission is established by a municipal charter or, in the case of a private agency designated to act as the youth service bureau, if the board of directors established by the by-laws of agency provides comparable citizen representation. Additionally, the Department may waive the requirement of the composition of the Advisory Board when one or more of the agencies mentioned in subsection (b)(1) of this section do not exist.
- Regular Meetings:
  Hold and document at least quarterly board meetings with approved minutes.
- Youth Involvement:
  Include at least one youth member, when possible, and engage youth through a Youth Advisory Board or similar forum.
- Annual Review:
  Boards should review the application, strategic plan, and budget annually before submission to DCF.
- Compliance:
  Maintain up-to-date municipal or nonprofit policies, including conflict of interest, personnel, and fiscal management procedures.

*An engaged board strengthens your annual submission, your funding stability, and your community credibility.*

### Technical Assistance and Support for Applicants

DCF Youth Service Bureau Liaisons

- Provide guidance on ACU completion, grant eligibility, and reporting.
- Review submissions and notify YSBs of missing information.
- Assist with interpretation of state policy and compliance standards.

CYSA (Connecticut Youth Services Association)

- Offers training, sample ACU materials, and mentorship for new directors.
- Coordinates peer-to-peer learning sessions and statewide updates.
- Serves as a liaison between DCF and local YSBs to ensure consistency.
- Website: www.ctyouthservices.org

Peer and Regional Support

- Connect with your Regional CYSA Representative or neighboring YSB Directors for shared templates and examples.
- Attend CYSA roundtables and DCF update meetings for real-time information and clarification.

*If you're unsure, ask early. The YSB network thrives on collaboration, and help is always available.*

Pro Tips for Staying on Track

- Keep a grant compliance binder or shared drive labeled by year (ACU, reports, fiscal docs, board minutes).
- Review your ACUs quarterly instead of annually, it makes reporting faster and more accurate.
- Attend CYSA or DCF grant webinars and bookmark the DCF YSB page for updates.
- Align your strategic goals with ACU priorities to make reporting meaningful, not just procedural.

Remember: The YSB grant isn't just funding, it's an investment in your community's youth infrastructure. How you document, evaluate, and share your story shapes the sustainability of your work statewide.

## Human Voices: Lessons from the Field

Every Youth Service Bureau is powered by people, professionals who bring heart, resilience, and creativity to their communities every day. The lessons below come directly

from Connecticut YSB leaders reflecting on what they've learned, what they love, and what keeps them grounded through challenges.

These stories remind us that while the work can be demanding, it is deeply meaningful.

### What I Wish I Knew When I Started

"I didn't think I'd stay for 35 years."

"A better understanding of how grants and data collection work, as well as acronyms and key players, would have made a big difference."

"That CYSA existed."

"The importance of the ACU as the foundation of a successful YSB."

"When I first started, I wish I had fully realized how critical it is to invest in building strong relationships not just within my team, but with external partners. Those connections often open doors and provide support when challenges arise."

**Common Themes:**

- The ACU isn't just paperwork, it's the blueprint for everything else.
- Relationships are the key to sustainability.
- Nobody does this work alone, the CYSA network is your community.
- Data, grants, and communication are learnable, and there's help everywhere.

*"You don't have to know it all on day one. But you do have to be curious and connected."*

### What I Love About This Work

"I love the flexibility and variety of direct service."

"The freedom to be creative to design activities and programs based on real community need."

"The balance of administration, prevention, education, counseling, youth empowerment, and community connection."

"Making a difference in people's lives, helping change laws for the better good."

"The mission of the work aligns with my personal values and purpose. Knowing that what I do contributes to something bigger than myself keeps me inspired."

**Common Themes:**

- No two days are ever the same, and that's a good thing.
- YSB work blends heart and strategy, prevention and policy, data and storytelling.
- The joy is in the *impact*: watching young people grow, families heal, and communities strengthen.

*"What keeps me going? The belief that every connection we build makes a ripple that can change a life."*

### Hard Moments, and What Got Me Through

"Working with kids and families in crisis. Good clinical supervision makes all the difference."

"When I'm nervous about trying something new, I remind myself *'You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.'* We ask youth to be brave; we have to model that."

"Changes in leadership, politics, budget freezes, and shifting priorities it's hard. But using data and storytelling helps communicate our value."

"Responding to the death of children alongside police partners was devastating. What helped was our strong YSB team, processing the grief together and not being afraid to lean on one another."

"Navigating a merger with a larger organization was difficult. I had to fight to preserve our mission and culture. Staying focused on our purpose, communicating openly, and seeking support from colleagues helped me stay grounded."

**Common Themes:**

- The hardest moments are also the most defining.
- Team culture and peer support are your greatest safety nets.
- When systems change, return to your *why*.
- It's okay to ask for help and to take care of yourself as fiercely as you care for others.

*"Resilience isn't something you have, it's something you practice, every day."*

### Advice for New YSB Leaders

"Buckle up and hang on."

“Reach out to seasoned directors or even new ones for help. We’ve all been there, and we’re happy to share what we’ve learned.”

“Review the ACU manual and framework, connect with your chapter, seek mentors, and get involved with CYSA to see the bigger picture.”

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help from senior directors or your CYSA chapter.”

“Build strong connections with your team, community partners, and stakeholders. Collaboration and communication are just as important as technical skills.”

**Common Themes:**

- This network thrives on mentorship, and there’s always someone willing to help.
- CYSA is your professional home, use it.
- Focus on people first: your staff, your partners, your youth.
- The learning curve is steep, but the rewards are profound.

*“You are joining a family of people who believe in possibility and that’s something worth staying for.”*

Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) are inherently collaborative. Their success depends on the strength of relationships across multiple systems; local, regional, and state. Each partnership expands the YSB’s reach, resources, and capacity to respond to community needs.

The following sections outline the most common and impactful partnerships that sustain YSB work across Connecticut.

## Key Partnerships and Collaborations

### Local Partnerships

**Schools**

Schools are often the YSB’s most consistent and valuable partner. Collaboration ensures prevention, early intervention, and support services reach youth where they spend most of their time.

**Common Collaborations**

- School-based counseling, mentoring, and prevention programs
- Truancy, attendance, and reengagement initiatives
- Restorative practices and Youth Diversion Team (YDT) coordination
- Student Assistance Programs and crisis response teams

- Prevention Education

**Tips for Strengthening Partnerships**

- Schedule quarterly check-ins with administrators and school social workers.
- Participate in district wellness or equity committees.
- Provide data to illustrate outcomes (attendance improvements, reduced referrals).
- Share successes publicly, invite school partners to co-present or co-sign reports.

**Legislative Note**

MOU Requirement (Public Act 24-45, Sec. 23)

Effective July 1, 2024, Section 23 of *Public Act 24-45* requires that, upon request from a Youth Service Bureau (YSB), each local or regional board of education enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the YSB.

The MOU must outline:
• The specific circumstances under which educational records may be shared with the YSB
• How those records will be received, used, and maintained in compliance with FERPA
• Roles, responsibilities, and points of contact for each party

Purpose:
Formalizing collaboration through an MOU ensures youth receive timely prevention and intervention supports while protecting confidentiality and clarifying information-sharing protocols.

Tips for Implementation:
• Review and, if needed, update existing agreements to align with the new statute.
• Include data-sharing triggers, referral procedures, and privacy safeguards.
• Plan for **annual review and renewal** with district partners.
• Consult your municipality's legal counsel or BOE attorney for review before adoption.

**Police Departments and Juvenile Justice Partners**

YSBs play a critical role in prevention and diversion, offering youth-centered alternatives to arrest and court involvement.

**Common Collaborations**

- Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs) and Youth Diversion Teams (YDTs)
- Police–YSB crisis response protocols
- Joint youth leadership or community service programs
- Training on adolescent development and trauma-informed approaches

**Tips for Strengthening Partnerships**

- Build mutual respect by learning each other's systems and constraints.
- Keep communication open and solution-focused, even when cases are complex.
- Emphasize shared goals: safety, accountability, and opportunity for youth.

*Strong justice partnerships rely on trust, consistency, and clear boundaries.*

**Municipal Leaders and Human Services Departments**

Municipal leaders provide the foundation of local support, through funding, policy alignment, and public visibility.

**Ways to Engage**

- Present annual YSB highlights to town councils or Boards of Selectmen.
- Include YSB staff in community health and human service task forces.
- Keep local officials informed about youth trends and program outcomes.
- Invite municipal leaders to YSB events, youth award ceremonies, or board meetings.

*When town leadership understands your value, they become your greatest advocates.*

**Local Nonprofits and Community Organizations**

YSBs operate best as part of a broader ecosystem of care. Collaboration prevents duplication and strengthens collective impact.

**Examples of Local Partners**

- Youth-serving nonprofits (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Scouts)
- Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments
- Faith-based organizations and civic clubs
- Food pantries, housing agencies, and mental-health providers
- Local businesses and community foundations

**Partnership Strategies**

- Host joint community events or volunteer days.
- Cross-promote programs on social media or in newsletters.
- Seek shared training opportunities or joint grant applications.

*Collaboration works best when you celebrate shared wins.*

## State Agency Partnerships

YSBs serve as the connective tissue between state systems and local implementation. Understanding each agency's role helps align services and funding opportunities.

| Agency | Role and Relevance | Website |
|---|---|---|
| **DCF – Department of Children and Families** | Oversees YSB designation, ACU, and Grant funding. Provides technical assistance and liaisons. | portal.ct.gov/DCF |
| **DMHAS – Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services** | Supports prevention and mental health programming through regional action councils (RACs). | portal.ct.gov/DMHAS |
| **SDE – State Department of Education** | Oversees local Boards of Education, student supports, and grants for youth development and mental health. | portal.ct.gov/SDE |
| **CSSD – Court Support Services Division** | Manages juvenile probation and restorative justice programs. Collaborates on JRB/YDT systems. | jud.ct.gov/cssd |
| **DCF Regional YSB Liaisons** | Provide ongoing technical assistance, compliance guidance, and updates. | ctyouthservices.org |
| **OEC – Office of Early Childhood** | Early childhood and family programs that complement youth prevention work. | ct.gov/oec |

*Strong state relationships ensure alignment, access to resources, and consistency across systems.*

## Relationship-Building Tips and Communication Strategies

1. **Start with Shared Goals.**
   Lead with your mission and how it complements your partner's. Mutual benefit builds buy-in.
2. **Be Consistent and Transparent.**
   Schedule regular meetings and follow up promptly after conversations. Reliability builds credibility.
3. **Share Data and Stories.**
   Combine statistics with success stories, numbers show effectiveness, stories show impact.
4. **Recognize and Celebrate Partners.**
   Acknowledge contributions publicly in newsletters, social media, or at events.
5. **Build Person-to-Person Relationships.**
   Systems collaborate, but people make it work. Invest in knowing your counterparts as colleagues and allies.

*Good communication is proactive, appreciative, and clear especially during times of change.*

## Key Resources

### Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA)

- Resource library, training calendar, and regional chapters.
- www.ctyouthservices.org

### DCF YSB Liaison Directory

- Updated list of contacts and regional assignments available through DCF.
- portal.ct.gov/DCF

### Regional Action Councils (RACs)

- Prevention coalitions that collaborate with YSBs on data, substance use prevention, and grant opportunities.
- ctpreventionnetwork.org

### Connecticut Association of Prevention Professionals (CAPP)

- Professional development, credentialing, and networking for prevention specialists.
- ctpreventionprofessionals.org

### Local Health Departments and Behavioral Health Networks

- Coordinate wellness initiatives, crisis response, and community health assessments.

**Quick Reflection**

Partnerships are the heartbeat of a YSB.
Each connection with a school, a police department, or a state agency extends your reach and amplifies your impact. Building these relationships intentionally ensures every young person in your community has a network of support, not just a single program.

## Administrative Essentials

Strong administration is what turns vision into sustained community impact.
This section outlines key elements every YSB leader should understand from budgeting and compliance to strategic planning and self-assessment.

### Budgeting Overview and Tips

**Understanding the YSB Budget**

Your budget reflects both your mission and your compliance. It includes core operating expenses (staff, administration, insurance, space) and program costs (supplies, youth activities, prevention materials).

YSBs often blend funding from multiple sources:

- **DCF Grant**– baseline operational funding tied to the ACU.
- **Municipal Appropriation** – local funding for personnel, facilities, or matching funds.
- **Grant or Contract Revenue** – e.g., prevention councils, foundations, schools.
- **Donations and Fundraising** – for 501(c)(3) YSBs or through local foundations.

### Best Practices for Fiscal Management

1. **Plan Ahead:** Develop your annual budget in tandem with ACU goals.
2. **Align Line Items:** Map each expense to an ACU function for easier reporting.
3. **Use Multiple Tabs or Columns:** Differentiate *startup, ongoing,* and *leveraged* costs.
4. **Forecast Variability:** Track seasonal costs (e.g., summer programming, youth employment).
5. **Keep a Reserve (If Possible):** For unexpected needs or grant match requirements.
6. **Review Monthly:** Reconcile expenditures with finance staff or the municipal accountant.

*A transparent budget is one of the best tools for building board and community trust.*

## Reporting and Compliance

YSBs must meet both **state** and **local** reporting standards. Compliance ensures accountability and continued funding.

### DCF Reporting Requirements

- **Annual Application** – Required for designation and grant eligibility.
- **End-of-Year Reports** – Document progress on goals, activities, and outcomes.
- **Fiscal Reports** – Budget vs. actual expenditures; certification of matching funds (if applicable).
- **Quarterly Data Reporting** – Report on key programming data points
- **Board Documentation** – Meeting minutes, roster, and evidence of community representation.

**Best Practice:** Create a shared "Reporting Calendar" that includes all DCF, municipal, and grant deadlines.

## The Ohio Scales

The **Ohio Scales for Youth Functioning** are used by many Connecticut YSBs to measure the effectiveness of behavioral and clinical interventions. They track changes in youth functioning over time through self-, parent-, and staff-completed forms.

### Key Points for Implementation:

- Ensure staff are trained to administer the tool consistently.
- Collect baseline data at program entry and follow-up data at completion.
- Use results to inform program evaluation and improvement.
- Keep data confidential but summarize aggregate results for annual reporting.

*Ohio Scales help YSBs move from anecdotal success to evidence-based impact.*

## Strategic Planning

A strategic plan is your YSB's roadmap, it turns vision into action. According to CYSA and the YSB Strategic Planning, a strong plan includes:

**Core Components**

1. **Mission & Vision Review:** Clarify your YSB's purpose and long-term aspirations.
2. **Environmental Scan:** Review local data, ACU findings, and stakeholder feedback.
3. **Goals & Objectives:** Identify 3–5 priorities tied to community needs.
4. **Action Steps:** Assign responsibilities, resources, and timeframes.
5. **Evaluation:** Define measurable outcomes and progress indicators.
6. **Communication:** Share results with the community, staff, and board.

**Planning Cycle**

Strategic plans are typically **3–5 years**, with annual updates.
Include your Advisory Board, staff, youth, and partners in the process ownership drives implementation.

**Pro Tip:** Align your strategic goals with ACU categories. This simplifies reporting and helps tell a cohesive story to funders.

*Strategic planning isn't a document; it's an ongoing conversation about where you're headed and why.*

## Self-Assessment for YSBs

Regular self-assessment keeps your organization grounded, accountable, and adaptive. The *Self-Assessment for YSBs* tool offers a structured way to evaluate performance across all five ACU areas.

Self Assessment for YSBs

**Assessment Domains**

- **Community Involvement:** Are youth and families meaningfully engaged in shaping programs?
- **Resource Development:** Are funding sources diversified and sustainable?
- **Research & Assessment:** Are data and evaluation methods current and useful?
- **Advocacy:** Does your YSB actively engage in local and state advocacy?
- **Management & Administration:** Are HR, fiscal, and policy systems documented and up to date?

**How to Use the Tool**

1. Convene a small team (staff, board, youth rep) to complete the assessment.

2. Score each area and note evidence or examples.
3. Identify strengths and growth opportunities.
4. Integrate findings into your next ACU submission and strategic plan.

**Reflection Questions:**

- What systems are working well?
- What new relationships or training might strengthen weak areas?
- How are we communicating our impact to the community?

*Self-assessment isn't about finding fault; it's about ensuring continuous growth.*

## Confidentiality, Risk, and Data Protection

Youth Service Bureaus handle sensitive information about children, families, and community partners. Protecting that data is both an ethical duty and a legal requirement.

**1. Confidentiality Standards**
YSB staff, volunteers, and interns must maintain strict confidentiality regarding client information. This includes:

- Personal identifiers, case notes, attendance records, and referral details.
- Information shared verbally by youth or families.
- Digital data such as emails, text messages, and cloud files.

Always obtain written consent before sharing client information with outside agencies, except when disclosure is required by law (for example, mandated reporting of suspected abuse).

**2. Legal Frameworks to Know**

- **FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act):** Protects student records shared by schools.
- **HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act):** Protects medical and mental-health information.
- **42 CFR Part 2:** Applies to substance-use treatment records.
- **CT Public Act 11-93 and DCF Policy #42-10:** Define confidentiality and record-keeping expectations for youth-serving agencies.

*When in doubt, do not share until you verify consent and the legal basis for disclosure.*

**3. Data Protection Practices**

- Store digital files on password-protected, encrypted drives or secure municipal servers.
- Limit access to staff who require it to perform their roles.
- Use locked filing cabinets for paper records.
- Avoid using personal devices or emails for youth data.
- Regularly back up files and follow your town or organization's IT policy for retention and disposal.

**4. Risk Management and Liability**
Risk management protects both participants and staff. Key elements include:

- **Insurance coverage:** Verify that your municipality or nonprofit policy includes general liability, automobile (for transport), and professional coverage.
  • **Incident reporting:** Create a clear procedure for documenting injuries, safety concerns, or behavioral incidents.
  • **Permission, medical, and media release forms:** Always collect updated forms for youth activities, including parental permission for participation**,** emergency contacts/important medical information, and photo/video releases for program use (e.g., websites, publications, or social media).
  • **Supervision ratios:** Maintain appropriate adult-to-youth ratios (typically 1:8 for middle school and 1:10 for high school youth).
  • **Technology and communication boundaries:** Establish expectations for limited use of personal phones or devices for work purposes, especially for direct-service staff communicating with clients, youth, or families.

*Consistency, documentation, and communication are your best risk-management tools.*

## Technology and Data Systems

YSBs increasingly rely on technology for communication, reporting, and service delivery. Strong systems improve efficiency but also require thoughtful management.

**Digital Infrastructure Checklist**

- Use secure, shared drives (e.g., OneDrive, Google Workspace, municipal servers) with permission-based access.
- Establish file-naming conventions and folder structures for ACU documentation, grants, and program data.
- Keep all official records in the organizational system, not personal accounts.
- Develop a simple "data dictionary" listing what is collected, where it's stored, and who maintains it.

**Cybersecurity Basics**

- Update passwords every 90 days and enable multi-factor authentication when possible.
- Lock computers when unattended.
- Never email personally identifying information without encryption.
- Work with your town IT department to set automatic back-ups and antivirus protection.

**Virtual Programming Best Practices**

- Use approved platforms (Zoom for Government, Teams, Google Meet) with waiting-room features enabled.
- Never allow one-on-one unsupervised online sessions with minors.
- Obtain parental consent for virtual participation.
- Keep the same standards of conduct and mandated-reporting responsibilities as in-person programs.

*Technology should make your YSB more connected; not less secure.*

## Long-Term Sustainability and Succession Planning

A healthy YSB prepares financially and operationally for the future.

**1. Financial Sustainability**

- Diversify revenue: municipal funding, state grants, private foundations, fundraising, and fee-for-service models.
- Track leveraged resources (volunteer hours, donations, partner contributions) – these strengthen grant narratives.
- Include indirect costs and administrative support in budgets when allowed.
- Maintain at least 3–6 months of operating reserves where possible.

**2. Scaling and Regional Partnerships**

- When exploring multi-town expansion, document clear MOUs outlining cost-sharing and service boundaries.
- Pilot shared staffing or joint programs before merging budgets.
- Evaluate capacity annually using ACU data and staff workload assessments.

**3. Succession Planning**

Leadership transitions are inevitable. A clear plan ensures continuity:

- Maintain updated organizational charts, job descriptions, and key passwords in a secure shared file.
- Cross-train staff on essential functions (billing, ACU submission, grant reporting).
- Notify your Advisory Board and CYSA representative early if leadership changes.

- Schedule an annual "Continuity Check-In" with staff to update emergency contacts and role coverage.

*Sustainability isn't just about money; it's about knowledge transfer and resilience.*

**Bringing It All Together**

A YSB that budgets wisely, reports transparently, plans strategically, and self-assesses regularly builds credibility and sustainability. These administrative essentials aren't just "behind-the-scenes" tasks, they are the scaffolding that allows every program, partnership, and prevention effort to thrive.

*Effective administration is quiet leadership, the steady rhythm that keeps everything else moving in harmony.*

## Best Practices

The Youth Service Bureau model is rooted in prevention, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Best practices ensure that every YSB, regardless of size or structure, provides effective, equitable, and ethical services to the youth and families it serves.

### Best Practices for YSBs

These practices have been distilled from decades of field experience and CYSA guidance. They represent the habits, systems, and values that define high-performing YSBs across Connecticut.

**1. Lead with Prevention and Strengths**

- Focus on upstream solutions that build protective factors, not just responses to crises.
- Center youth and family strengths, every program should amplify resilience and belonging.

**2. Maintain Clear and Consistent Communication**

- Keep regular contact with schools, police, and municipal partners.
- Share successes and data through newsletters, reports, and social media.

**3. Invest in Professional Development**

- Encourage ongoing training in trauma-informed care, equity, and youth development.
- Support staff participation in CYSA, regional councils, and prevention networks.

**4. Engage Youth Voice**

- Include youth in decision-making through Youth Advisory Boards or leadership roles.
- Create safe, inclusive spaces where young people are heard and valued.

**5. Practice Data-Informed Decision-Making**

- Use data to guide programming, identify needs, and demonstrate impact.
- Combine quantitative data (e.g., surveys, Ohio Scales) with qualitative stories of change.

**6. Build Sustainability**

- Diversify funding streams and maintain transparent fiscal practices.
- Align budgets with ACU and strategic goals.

**7. Collaborate Across Systems**

- Cultivate strong relationships with schools, human services, health, and justice sectors.
- Participate in community coalitions and share expertise with regional partners.

**8. Prioritize Equity and Access**

- Strive to remove barriers to participation for marginalized youth and families.
- Apply cultural humility in all programming and outreach.

*Excellence in prevention isn't about doing more, it's about doing what matters most, together.*

## Code of Ethics for Professionals and Volunteers

YSB staff, volunteers, and board members uphold the highest standards of professional integrity. The following principles align with CYSA and national youth work ethics frameworks:

1. **Respect and Dignity:**
   Treat all youth and families with respect, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance.
2. **Confidentiality:**
   Protect youth and family information except where disclosure is required by law.
3. **Professional Boundaries:**
   Maintain clear and appropriate relationships with youth, families, and colleagues.

4. **Integrity and Accountability:**
   Be honest, transparent, and responsible in all professional actions and communications.
5. **Competence:**
   Continuously seek to improve knowledge and skills through training and supervision.
6. **Cultural and Social Awareness:**
   Recognize and challenge personal biases; promote inclusion and equity.
7. **Collaboration:**
   Foster partnerships that support youth well-being and community strength.
8. **Advocacy:**
   Speak up for youth rights and needs in policy, systems, and practice.

**Volunteer Adaptation:**
Volunteers should receive an orientation to these ethical standards, including confidentiality, mandated reporting, and professionalism in youth spaces. All staff and volunteers working directly with youth must complete state and national background checks consistent with local policies and funding requirements.

*Ethics are the heart of credibility, they sustain trust, protect relationships, and model the respect we expect in our communities.*

### Evidence-Based and Promising Practices

YSBs are encouraged to align programs with **evidence-based** or **evidence-informed** models whenever possible. These frameworks ensure interventions are grounded in research and proven to achieve outcomes.

**National Databases for Evidence-Based Practice**

| Resource | Focus Area | Website |
|---|---|---|
| **SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center** | Substance use prevention, mental health, treatment, recovery | samhsa.gov/ebp-resource-center |
| **Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development** | Proven youth development and family-strengthening programs | blueprintsprograms.org |
| **CDC Community Preventive Services Task Force** | Population-level prevention strategies | thecommunityguide.org |
| **Youth.gov Program Directory** | Federal registry of youth-focused prevention and intervention programs | youth.gov/evidence-innovation |

**How to Use These Tools**

- Search by topic (e.g., truancy prevention, mentoring, mental health promotion).
- Identify programs that fit your community's demographics and needs.
- Adapt evidence-based models responsibly, maintaining fidelity while ensuring cultural relevance.
- Pair data with community voice to strengthen both credibility and connection.

*Evidence-based practice doesn't replace local wisdom, it amplifies it.*

**Integrating Best Practices into Daily Work**

To make best practices sustainable:

- Embed ethics and data-sharing expectations into staff onboarding.
- Review one ACU function per quarter during staff or board meetings.
- Use your strategic plan and self-assessment to monitor progress.
- Celebrate milestones, improvement is a continual journey, not a checklist.

**Final Reflection**

YSBs stand at the intersection of heart and strategy, connecting prevention science with the lived realities of young people and families.

When ethics, data, collaboration, and compassion align, YSBs become more than service agencies. They become engines of community change, places where prevention grows, youth voices lead, and hope is operationalized every day.

## Centering Youth Voice & Leadership

Youth are not just recipients of YSB services, they are **partners**, **leaders**, and **co-creators** in shaping their communities. Centering youth voice is both a best practice and a statutory expectation under Connecticut General Statute §10-19m, which defines YSBs as responsible for helping all youth "develop positively and function as responsible members of their communities."

## Why Youth Engagement Is Essential to YSB Work

Youth engagement transforms prevention and intervention efforts from "for youth" to "with youth." It reflects the **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** approach, which emphasizes building strengths, skills, and connections rather than focusing on problems or deficits.

### Why It Matters

- Builds **identity and belief in the future** helping youth see their own potential.
- Fosters **resilience and self-efficacy**, youth learn they can shape outcomes.
- Strengthens **social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence.**
- Reduces **risk behaviors** (e.g., substance use, violence, truancy) through connection.
- Promotes **equity** by amplifying youth voices often left unheard.

*When youth feel ownership, programs become movements and prevention becomes culture change.*

## Understanding Adolescent Development

YSBs work with youth navigating the most dynamic phase of growth physically, socially, and cognitively. Understanding this stage helps shape programs that empower rather than alienate.

### Key Developmental Insights

- **Identity Formation:** Teens are defining who they are; self-expression and belonging are vital.
- **Brain Development:** The prefrontal cortex (decision-making, impulse control) continues to mature into the mid-20s, guidance and patience matter.
- **Peer Influence:** Connection drives behavior; youth engagement channels that power positively.
- **Autonomy and Competence:** Adolescents need increasing responsibility, not restriction.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Safe, supportive adults help youth practice empathy and resilience.

*The more youth are understood, the more effectively they can lead.*

## Creating Inclusive, Youth-Friendly Spaces

A welcoming environment is the foundation of youth voice. Whether physical or virtual, YSB spaces should communicate belonging, safety, and respect.

**Best Practice Elements for Youth Spaces**

- **Appropriate Structure:** Youth-led, adult-mentored.
- **Supportive Relationships:** Multiple mentors, not just one staff connection.
- **Safety:** Comfortable physical setting with food, water, and psychological safety.
- **Belonging:** Defined youth roles and responsibilities (e.g., ambassadors, facilitators).
- **Positive Norms:** Youth-created group rules and agreements.
- **Opportunities for Skill Building:** Public speaking, team projects, community service.
- **Integration:** Link family, school, and community partners.

**Inclusivity Tips**

- Use gender-neutral language and affirm all identities.
- Make accessibility (physical, sensory, and cultural) a planning priority.
- Ask youth what makes them feel safe and adjust accordingly.

*"Nothing about us without us" isn't just a slogan, it's a principle of trust.*

## Youth Leadership Models

YSBs can use a range of structures to elevate youth leadership depending on size, capacity, and community need.

**Youth Advisory Boards (YABs)**

A cornerstone of YSB youth engagement. YABs offer structured opportunities for youth to advise on programs, policies, and community issues.
**Best Practices**

- Include diverse voices representing different schools, ages, and experiences.
- Provide orientation, mentorship, and clear expectations.
- Rotate leadership roles and ensure youth facilitate at least some meetings.
- Celebrate youth contributions publicly and regularly.

**Peer Educators and Mentors**

Train youth to lead prevention efforts, facilitate workshops, or mentor younger peers.
**Benefits:** Builds confidence, reinforces learning, and creates credible messengers.
**Supports:** Stipends, supervision, and debriefing to maintain balance and safety.

**Co-Created Programming**

Invite youth to help design or co-deliver programs based on identified community needs. **Example:** Youth-adult think tanks that design wellness campaigns or service projects based on data from local needs assessments

*Leadership isn't a title; it's participation with purpose.*

### Avoiding Tokenism

Meaningful youth engagement takes time, trust, and follow-through. Tokenism, including youth for appearances rather than impact, can damage credibility and discourage participation.

**Avoid Tokenism By:**

- Giving youth real decision-making power (votes, budgets, or project ownership).
- Valuing process over polish, let youth ideas evolve organically.
- Compensating youth for their time through stipends, service hours, or recognition.
- Following up: show how their input influenced policy, programming, or change.
- Preparing adults: provide training on adult-youth partnerships and power-sharing.

*If youth are in the room but not at the table, they're guests, not partners.*

**Infusing Fun and Connection**

As highlighted in the CYSA Youth Development Playbook, consistent engagement grows when youth enjoy what they're doing.

- Incorporate adventure-based learning, art, recreation, and food these are entry points to deeper work.
- Build intergenerational creativity and teamwork through service projects, leadership retreats, and field experiences.
- Explore alternative models like **Equine Experiential Learning** or **team-building programs** for neurodivergent youth.

*Connection + Joy = Consistent Engagement.*

**Quick Self-Check for Directors**

**Ask Yourself:**

- Do youth help design or evaluate your programs?
- Do youth have visible leadership roles in your organization?
- Are meetings and materials youth-friendly and accessible?
- Are adults trained to listen more than they lead?

- Can youth describe how their feedback has been used?

*When youth feel seen, heard, and valued they stay, lead, and transform.*

### Resources for Youth Engagement

| Resource | Focus Area | Website |
|---|---|---|
| **Search Institute** | Developmental Relationships Framework | searchinstitute.org |
| **ACT for Youth** | Positive Youth Development and engagement tools | actforyouth.net |
| **Youth.gov** | Federal youth engagement and leadership resources | youth.gov |
| **Youth Service America (YSA)** | Youth-led service learning and civic engagement | ysa.org |
| **Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA)** | Local models, trainings, and YAB support | ctyouthservices.org |

**Final Reflection**

Youth engagement is not an optional add-on; it is the essence of prevention.

When YSBs center youth voice, they move from serving youth to partnering with them, from programs to empowerment, from compliance to connection. That's where change begins.

## Prevention & Programming

Youth Service Bureaus provide a **continuum of services** that promote positive youth development, prevent problems before they occur, and respond effectively when they do. Each YSB designs programs tailored to local needs, drawing on community data, partnerships, and youth voice.

### Types of YSB Services

YSBs operate across four broad categories, often overlapping to create a holistic approach to youth well-being.

**1. Prevention**

Focuses on building protective factors and reducing risk before problems start.
**Examples:**

- Substance-use and vaping prevention campaigns
- Social-emotional learning and resiliency workshops

- Youth leadership or peer-mentoring programs
- Family strengthening activities
- After-school enrichment and recreation

*Prevention is not the absence of risk, it's the presence of connection, skills, and opportunity.*

**2. Early Intervention**

Addresses emerging issues before they escalate, helping youth and families reconnect to community supports.
**Examples:**

- Truancy and attendance initiatives
- Youth Diversion Teams (YDTs) and Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs)
- Restorative justice circles and school-based mediation
- Short-term counseling or case management
- Parent education and support groups
- Youth recovery support programs and peer-based wellness initiatives.

**Goals:** Prevent deeper system involvement and promote accountability, growth, and restoration.

**3. Clinical Services**

Some YSBs provide direct or contracted clinical supports, particularly in mental-health and family counseling.
**Examples:**

- Individual, family, or group counseling
- Crisis intervention and referrals
- Coordination with school-based mental-health providers
- Case consultation and wraparound support

**Best Practices:**

- Maintain licensed supervision and HIPAA-compliant documentation.
- Integrate clinical work within the YSB's broader prevention framework.
- Ensure cultural competence and trauma-informed care.

**4. Enrichment & Youth Development**

Provides opportunities for learning, leadership, and connection that strengthen community belonging.
**Examples:**

- Youth advisory boards, leadership institutes, and service learning
- Arts, STEM, and cultural-expression programs
- Summer camps and recreation programs
- Career exploration and youth-employment initiatives

*Enrichment helps youth discover who they are, what they love, and how they contribute.*

### Conducting a Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is the **foundation of effective programming**. It identifies community strengths, challenges, and gaps so YSBs can allocate resources strategically.

**Purpose**

- Guide program planning and funding decisions.
- Build community consensus on youth priorities.
- Provide data for ACU, grant applications, and strategic plans.
- Strengthen credibility with municipal leaders and partners.

**Tools & Data Sources**

- **Surveys:** Youth, parents, and service providers.
- **Focus Groups / Forums:** Invite diverse voices, especially youth.
- **Existing Data:** YRBSS, CT Data Collaborative, local school attendance or police data.
- **Resource Inventories:** List current youth programs, service gaps, and accessibility.

**Sample Questions:**

- What are the top concerns facing youth and families in our community?
- What supports or programs do youth wish existed?
- Which populations or neighborhoods are under-served?

**Pro Tips:**

- Partner with schools or prevention councils for survey distribution.
- Translate surveys and use multiple formats (paper, digital, QR code).
- Share results publicly, transparency builds trust and engagement.

*A strong needs assessment turns local insight into measurable impact.*

## Equity and Cultural Relevance in Program Design

Prevention and programming must reflect the lived experiences, cultures, and values of the youth and families served.

### Key Practices for Equity

1. **Representation:** Involve youth and adults from diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds in program design.
2. **Access:** Remove barriers such as transportation, cost, scheduling, or language.
3. **Cultural Humility:** Learn from community members; avoid assumptions.
4. **Inclusive Language & Imagery:** Review materials to ensure they reflect all identities.
5. **Feedback Loops:** Ask participants regularly what's working and what could change.

### Building Trust with Underserved Communities

- Partner with trusted local leaders and cultural organizations.
- Host programs in community-based or faith spaces, not only town offices.
- Recognize holidays, traditions, and assets within every culture.
- Use bilingual or bicultural staff whenever possible.

*Equity isn't a side initiative, it's how we make prevention meaningful for everyone.*

### From Data to Design

1. **Analyze:** Review needs-assessment results by theme or population.
2. **Prioritize:** Identify 3–5 focus areas aligned with ACU functions.
3. **Plan:** Develop logic models or simple program frameworks with outcomes.
4. **Implement:** Pilot, evaluate, and adjust.
5. **Share:** Report results with visuals and stories to partners and funders.

*Good programming grows from good listening.*

### Resources for Program Development

| Resource | Use | Website |
|---|---|---|
| **SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center** | Prevention and behavioral-health program database | samhsa.gov/ebp-resource-center |
| **Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development** | Validated youth development models | blueprintsprograms.org |
| **CT Data Collaborative** | Community data sets and visualizations | ctdata.org |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **CT Prevention Network / RACs** | Regional prevention councils and training support | ctpreventionnetwork.org |
| **ACT for Youth** | Youth engagement and program planning resources | actforyouth.net |

**Final Reflection**

YSBs succeed when prevention, inclusion, and data come together.

Every program, from a youth-leadership retreat to a family-wellness night, is an opportunity to build resilience, belonging, and hope.

Prevention isn't just a service. It's the culture we create around our youth, one connection at a time.

## Crisis Response & Safety Planning

Even in primarily preventive settings, youth and families sometimes face crisis situations. Clear policies and confident staff response protect everyone involved.

**1. Mandated Reporting**
All YSB employees and volunteers who work with youth are **mandated reporters** under Connecticut General Statute § 17a-101.

- **Report immediately** to DCF Care Line (1-800-842-2288) when you suspect abuse or neglect of a child under 18.
- Notify your supervisor as soon as possible, but do not wait for approval to report.
- Submit written DCF-136 form within 48 hours of the initial call.
- Document all steps taken and store records in a secure file.

*"Reasonable suspicion" is the threshold, you don't need proof, just concern based on observation or disclosure.*

**2. Responding to a Youth in Crisis**
Whether the issue is mental-health distress, suicidal ideation, substance use, or violence risk, staff should follow a consistent protocol:

1. **Ensure immediate safety.** Stay with the youth and remove others from danger.
2. **Notify supervisor or on-call clinical staff.**
3. **Engage support:** call 911 if life-threatening, or 211/988 for mobile crisis.
4. **Contact parent/guardian** as soon as appropriate.
5. **Document** incident, actions taken, and next steps.

6. **Debrief and follow up** with youth and staff involved.

**3. Safety Planning for Programs**

- Maintain a current **Emergency Action Plan** with contact numbers, evacuation routes, and designated first aid personnel.
- Keep copies of permission and medical forms onsite during activities or trips.
- Review behavior expectations and emergency procedures with youth at program start.
- Conduct background checks for staff and volunteers per municipal or DCF guidelines.
- Provide annual training on first aid, CPR, and trauma-informed response.

*Preparation builds confidence and confidence protects youth and staff alike.*

## Youth Diversion Teams (YDTs)

**Overview**

Youth Diversion Teams (YDTs) are Connecticut's **restorative alternative** to the formal juvenile justice system. They provide coordinated, community-based responses to youth who engage in low-level or status offenses, with a focus on accountability, growth, and prevention of future system involvement.

Under the **DCF Diversion Grant Initiative**, YDTs build on decades of YSB success with **Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs)** while aligning with modern best practices in youth development and equity.

### Core Goals:

- Divert eligible youth from formal court involvement.
- Address underlying needs through coordinated community supports.
- Strengthen youth accountability through restorative processes.
- Engage families as partners in problem-solving.
- Reduce disproportionate system involvement for youth of color and other marginalized groups.

**Target Population:**
Youth ages 10–17 referred for minor offenses or behavioral issues who are eligible for diversion under state statute or local referral agreements.

*Diversion is not leniency, it's a smarter, more effective path to accountability and healing.*

## YDT Model and Structure

Each YDT includes:

- A **YSB Coordinator** (lead convener and case manager).
- A **Multidisciplinary Team** representing law enforcement, schools, human services, and behavioral health.
- **Referral Sources** such as police, schools, or courts.
- **Program Menu** that may include restorative conferences, skill-building groups, mentoring, and community service.

**Core Elements of the Model:**

1. **Screening & Intake** – Confirm eligibility and assess youth/family needs.
2. **Case Planning** – Create individualized diversion plans with measurable goals.
3. **Intervention** – Connect youth to community resources, counseling, or service projects.
4. **Accountability** – Track completion of agreed-upon goals and monitor progress.
5. **Closure & Follow-Up** – Celebrate success and ensure supports continue post-diversion.

## Best Practices for Youth Diversion Teams

Drawing from statewide implementation experience, the following practices consistently lead to stronger outcomes:

**1. Embrace Restorative Philosophy**

- Center relationships and repair of harm.
- Engage victims, youth, and families in dialogue when possible.
- Shift focus from punishment to accountability, empathy, and reintegration.

**2. Prioritize Equity and Access**

- Collect and analyze data by race, gender, and town to identify disparities.
- Provide language access and culturally responsive supports.
- Monitor referral patterns to ensure fair and consistent eligibility.

**3. Coordinate, Don't Duplicate**

- Map community resources and create referral agreements with schools, counseling centers, and mentors.
- Use data-sharing agreements that protect confidentiality while promoting collaboration.

**4. Build Relationships with Law Enforcement and Schools**

- Provide joint training on adolescent development, trauma, and restorative justice.
- Maintain clear referral protocols to prevent confusion or over-referral.
- Share success stories and outcomes to sustain buy-in.

**5. Document and Evaluate**

- Maintain clear case files, diversion plans, and outcome data.
- Use tools like **Ohio Scales** or local satisfaction surveys to measure impact.
- Report data through DCF and CYSA templates to track consistency statewide.

*What gets measured gets strengthened, data tells the story of change.*

### Resources

| Resource | Purpose | Website / Contact |
|---|---|---|
| **DCF Youth Diversion Team Guidance** | Framework, forms, and reporting requirements | portal.ct.gov/DCF |
| **CYSA Diversion Resources Page** | Templates, sample MOUs, and peer connections | ctyouthservices.org |
| **CT Judicial Branch – CSSD** | Juvenile justice collaboration and data coordination | jud.ct.gov/cssd |
| **Center for Restorative Justice (Suffolk University)** | Restorative model training and consultation | suffolk.edu/restorativejustice |
| **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)** | Best practices in diversion and trauma-informed juvenile justice | ncjfcj.org |

**Final Reflection**

Youth Diversion Teams embody the spirit of the YSB model, prevention through partnership, accountability through empathy, and justice through connection.

They remind us that when communities invest in understanding and supporting youth rather than penalizing them, everyone benefits.

## Data, Evaluation, and Telling Your Story

Data gives your YSB credibility. Stories give it heart. When paired together, they show both the measurable and human impact of your work, the numbers that matter and the lives behind them.

This section outlines how to collect, analyze, and communicate information that captures your YSB's true value to funders, partners, and the community.

**Data Reporting in Connecticut**

DCF and CYSA has partnered with DillingerRad to assist with online reporting of program and service data. Data collection occurs throughout the year, with quarterly pulls that inform statewide reporting, funding, and evaluation. Directors can work directly with Dillinger support staff for training, troubleshooting, and technical assistance to ensure accurate data entry and alignment with Results-Based Accountability (RBA) measures.

### What Data to Collect and Why It Matters

**Purpose of Data:**

- Measure progress toward goals and outcomes.
- Inform decisions about programs and resource allocation.
- Demonstrate accountability for funding and compliance.
- Strengthen community partnerships and advocacy efforts.

### Common Data Points for YSBs:

| Category | Examples of Metrics |
|---|---|
| **Program Participation** | # of youth served, demographics, attendance, completion rates |
| **Service Impact** | Changes in risk/protective factors, Ohio Scales results, satisfaction surveys |
| **Community Involvement** | Advisory Board activity, partner meetings, youth advisory participation |
| **Advocacy & Outreach** | Public presentations, campaigns, and collaborative initiatives |
| **Fiscal & Resource Development** | Grants obtained, leveraged funds, volunteer hours, donations |

*If you don't measure it, you can't grow it, and you can't tell its story.*

### State Data Systems and Portals

YSBs are connected to several statewide data systems used for compliance and continuous improvement:

| System | Purpose | Notes |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **DillingerRad Data Collection Portal** | Quarterly submission of programming data | Collection, analysis and communication of key data points |
| **CTGMS (Grants Management System)** | Used for budget, fiscal reporting, and contract documentation | Access provided by DCF after grant approval |
| **Ohio Scales** | Tracks changes in youth functioning for counseling and diversion participants | Administered by trained staff or clinicians; reported in aggregate |
| **CYSA Data Dashboards** | Emerging data-sharing and visualization tools | Useful for comparing trends regionally and statewide |

**Pro Tip:** Create a simple "Data Calendar" to track collection points monthly, quarterly, and annually. Align it with reporting cycles and ACU updates.

### Creating Logic Models and Outcome Frameworks

A **logic model** connects your activities to measurable outcomes. It shows how your efforts lead to change and helps funders understand your impact.

**Core Components of a Logic Model:**

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Funding, staff, partners** | Programs, trainings, counseling | # served, sessions, events | Short-term: Knowledge/skills gained<br>Intermediate: Behavior change<br>Long-term: Improved well-being |

**Example:**
If your YSB runs a youth leadership program…

- **Input:** Staff, space, and funding.
- **Activity:** Weekly leadership workshops.
- **Output:** 25 youth complete the series.
- **Outcome:** Increased self-efficacy, civic engagement, and positive peer connections.

**Tools:**

- CYSA logic model templates
- SAMHSA's "Strategic Prevention Framework" (SPF)
- Results-Based Accountability (RBA) approach

*Logic models help translate vision into measurable change.*

## Turning Data into Impact Narratives

Data shows *what* happened. Stories show *why it matters*.
When combined, they make your YSB's work real to funders, community leaders, and residents.

**Steps to Create Impact Narratives**

1. **Start with the Human Story:** Who benefited? What changed?
2. **Back It Up with Data:** Include one or two metrics or trends.
3. **Connect to Mission:** Explain how this reflects your YSB's purpose.
4. **End with a Call to Action:** Invite engagement, funding, or partnership.

**Example:**

"This year, 68 students completed our Truancy Prevention Program and 92% improved attendance by at least five days. One student shared, 'I finally feel like people believe in me again.' Programs like this keep kids in school, and our community stronger."

*Data proves it works. Storytelling makes people care.*

**Visual Storytelling and Annual Reports**

Visual communication bridges the gap between statistics and understanding. Clean, consistent design helps your audience see impact at a glance.

**Tips for Effective Visuals:**

- Use **infographics** to highlight key stats (youth served, programs offered, outcomes).
- Create **before/after** comparisons to show change.
- Use **quotes and photos** (with permission) for authenticity.
- Include **QR codes** linking to program videos, registration, or donation pages

**Annual Reports: Best Practice Structure**

1. **Message from the Director/Board Chair**
2. **Mission & Highlights of the Year**
3. **Data Snapshots & Success Stories**

4. **Financial Overview**
5. **Partners & Donors**
6. **Looking Ahead / Call to Action**

*Your annual report should read like a story of collective success, not just a spreadsheet.*

## Marketing Your YSB

Visibility builds sustainability. Effective marketing means sharing your message across multiple channels with consistent branding and tone.

**Five Key Marketing Channels:**

1. **Website** – Your digital "front door." Keep it updated with current programs, staff, and contact info.
2. **Social Media** – Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn are ideal for sharing impact and engaging youth.
3. **Email Marketing** – Use tools like *Constant Contact* to send newsletters and updates to partners.
4. **Print Media** – Flyers, brochures, and postcards. Include QR codes for easy access to online content.
5. **Community Media** – Local cable or radio features (e.g., "AHM Today") to share success stories.

**Tips for Sustainable Marketing**

- Develop a **content calendar** aligned with campaigns or seasons.
- Use **templates** in Canva or Adobe Express to maintain consistent visuals.
- Assign staff or interns to manage social-media scheduling and analytics.
- Highlight *people and progress*, not just programs.

*Every YSB has a story worth telling, your data and voice make it undeniable.*

**Final Reflection**

Data is the proof. Storytelling is the persuasion. Together, they create sustainability.

When YSBs document outcomes and share them widely through reports, social media, and personal narratives. They don't just meet compliance; they build trust, attract partners, and inspire community investment in the wellbeing of youth and families.

# Advocacy 101

YSBs were created by advocates and remain vital because of them.
Advocacy isn't just a policy activity; it's part of the YSB mission. Every time a director, youth, or parent speaks about local needs, they're helping to shape a more responsive and equitable system.

## Advocacy 101: How YSBs Can Participate in Policy Change

Advocacy means educating, informing, and inspiring action to influence decisions that affect youth and families. It can take place at the local, regional, or state level, and it can be as simple as a conversation or as formal as legislative testimony.

YSBs have a unique position: they sit at the intersection of community service, prevention, and systems change.

**YSBs Can Advocate By:**

- Sharing stories and data that highlight youth needs and program impact.
- Building relationships with local and state decision-makers.
- Participating in CYSA advocacy efforts.
- Educating the public about prevention, equity, and youth development.
- Supporting youth to use their voices as leaders and storytellers.

*Advocacy is not about politics, it's about presence.*

## Local-Level Advocacy Strategies

YSBs often start advocacy close to home, building visibility and trust within their own towns and regions.

**Local-Level Actions:**

- **Attend or Present at Town Meetings:** Share annual highlights, youth outcomes, or community needs.
- **Engage the Board of Education:** Advocate for joint prevention initiatives, school-based liaisons, and after-school supports.
- **Collaborate with Police & Human Services:** Promote trauma-informed and restorative responses to youth issues.
- **Publish an Annual Report:** Include data and stories to show measurable impact.
- **Leverage Local Media:** Submit op-eds, newsletters, or interviews to raise awareness of YSB impact.

*Consistent communication builds advocacy capital.*

## State-Level Advocacy Strategies

At the state level, YSBs can shape legislation, funding, and statewide policy by working together through CYSA.

**Best Practices from CYSA Advocacy Work:**

1. **Stay Informed:**
    - Track bills related to youth, prevention, and social services.
    - Subscribe to CYSA and DCF updates.
    - Know your legislators and their committees (especially Education, Appropriations, and Human Services).
2. **Build Relationships Year-Round:**
    - Don't wait until budget season. Invite legislators to visit your YSB and meet youth participants.
    - Send thank-you letters when legislators support youth programs.
3. **Use a Unified Voice:**
    - Coordinate with CYSA advocacy alerts to ensure consistent messaging across towns.
    - Share real stories, legislators remember people, not numbers.
4. **Know the Rules:**
    - **Lobbying** (trying to influence specific legislation) is limited for municipal YSBs and nonprofits using state funds.
    - **Advocacy** (educating, sharing data, raising awareness) is always allowed and encouraged.
    - Review your town's or agency's lobbying policies before direct action.

*Information is advocacy. Relationships make it effective.*

## Building a Culture of Advocacy

Advocacy works best when it's part of the organization's DNA, not a one-time event.

**Ways to Build Advocacy Culture:**

- **Empower Staff and Youth:** Provide training in public speaking and storytelling.
- **Use Data in Advocacy:** Turn ACU reports, outcome data, and success stories into one-pagers for legislators.
- **Celebrate Successes:** Recognize advocacy wins, from a new partnership to a policy change.
- **Align with CYSA Campaigns:** Participate in Advocacy Day and the annual Legislative Breakfast.
- **Document Impact:** Keep an "Advocacy Log" of meetings, events, and testimonies for your records and ACU documentation.

### Key Resources

| Resource | Purpose | Website / Contact |
|---|---|---|
| **CYSA Legislative & Advocacy Page** | Updates, bill tracking, and talking points | ctyouthservices.org |
| **CT General Assembly (CGA)** | Bill tracking, committees, and contact info | cga.ct.gov |
| **Office of State Ethics** | Lobbying definitions, compliance, and reporting | https://portal.ct.gov/ethics |
| **National League of Cities – Youth Engagement Network** | Tools for local government advocacy | nlc.org |
| **Voices for Children** | Policy analysis and advocacy training | ctvoices.org |

### Advocacy vs. Lobbying- Know Your Boundaries

YSBs play a key role in educating leaders about youth issues, but there are legal limits on what certain entities can do.

| | Advocacy (Always Allowed) | Lobbying (Restricted) |
|---|---|---|
| **Definition** | Educating officials or the public about issues, sharing data and stories, and recommending policy improvements. | Attempting to influence specific legislation or asking an official to vote for/against a bill. |
| **Examples** | Hosting a legislator visit to your YSB; providing program outcomes; testifying about youth needs without taking a position on a bill. | Urging someone to "vote yes on HB ####"; emailing a legislator requesting funding for a specific bill. |
| **Municipal YSBs** | May educate and share information freely but should not engage in lobbying activity as defined by state ethics law. | |
| **Nonprofit 501(c)(3) YSBs** | May lobby in a limited way if it does not exceed IRS expenditure limits and is properly tracked. | |

**Tips for Staying Compliant**

- Stick to facts, data, and stories, not vote requests.
- Coordinate with CYSA for unified messaging and legislative updates.
- Use town communication channels for official information sharing.
- When in doubt, consult municipal legal counsel or CYSA before public advocacy.

*Educate, don't endorse, that's the YSB standard for responsible advocacy.*

**Final Reflection**

Advocacy isn't about making noise; it's about making meaning.

Every story you share, every meeting you attend, and every youth you empower adds up to systems that listen better, act faster, and care more. The YSB network was built by advocates, and the next generation of advocates is already walking through your doors.

## Appendix

The following links provide access to key resources, templates, and forms utilized by YSBs across Connecticut.

Mentor Request Form

CYSA Chapter Representatives

YSB Map

YSB State Statute

CYSA Bylaws

ACU Overview

Sample Youth Permission Slip

Ohio Scales Forms

School Referrals and Forms

YDT Overview and Video

FWSN Forms and Guides

Advocacy Overview

Legislative Meeting Resources

Best Practices and Code of Ethics for YSBs

Self Assessment Tool

Strategic Planning for YSBs