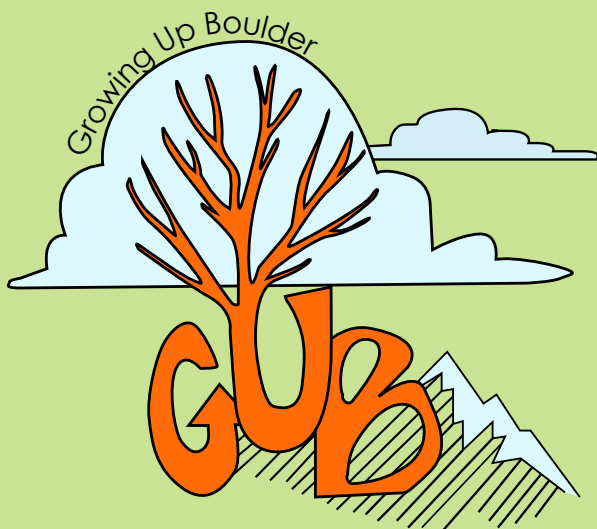


Growing Up Boulder's Focus Group with Junior Rangers : How to Include Ongoing Youth Voice in Open Space and Mountain Parks

Wednesday July 27, 2016



Overview

On July 27, 2016 Growing Up Boulder (GUB) staff worked with Open Space Mountain Parks (OSMP) staff and a group of twelve Jr. Rangers, ages 14 to 17, to determine whether there should be year-round youth voice in OSMP, and if so, what that would look like. This project was initiated in response to the department's wish to include teens and younger children in the OSMP master planning process.

GUB staff led a two-hour focus group at the Wonderland Lake Ranger's Cottage. The project involved the following participants:

- GUB staff: GUB Coordinator Mara Mintzer, Program Associate Cathy Hill, and GUB Intern Sarah Bartosh
- Twelve Jr. Rangers
- Two Jr. Ranger Leads: Calvin Mooz and Cara Ascarrunz
- OSMP Jr. Ranger Program Coordinator Halice Ruppi and Program Assistant Laila Murfin

GUB facilitated a series of activities with a group that invited youth to build community, explore the concept of an on-going OSMP Teen Advisory Group, and identify the characteristics of such a group. The goal was to gather meaningful data that the city could incorporate into a possible future OSMP youth/teen board.

Summary of Findings

Students in the focus group were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about year-round youth voice in OSMP. The youth recommended a Teen Advisory Board that would meet between one to two times a month. It was evident from the discussion that friendships and working with peers and meeting new people are priorities for this age group. This group of students was highly interested in the empowerment and satisfaction that comes from learning new things within a peer group. Several groups spoke about using technology as an outreach tool to gather child/youth voice in the community.

Detailed Findings:

Procedures and Responses

GUB staff started our engagement by having students work individually on five questions. These questions served as a warm-up exercise for the students and helped the staff get to know the students and understand what was important to them.

What are the best aspects of being a Junior Ranger?

- Team Work
- Having fun
- Team building with both familiar and new people
- Creating a community
- Awesome team, positive attitude, being outside
- Great people
- Being outside
- Outdoors! Having fun with your peers
- Overcoming challenges together, sharing common goals
- Satisfaction
- Team culture
- Outdoor service
- Positive outcomes
- Meeting all the new awesome people at Jr. Rangers is the best part of this; also the teamwork
- You get to meet new people your age and form bonds at a legitimate job
- Meeting new people
- Positive work environment

Give an example of a time you were asked to work together as a team and the outcome was positive.

- Basketball team was positive because we formed a group with a common goal and fought for it
- When I played on my basketball team, we had to work together to win games
- Team had to work together to set rocks and shut off a braid, which lead to a positive outcome
- Soccer team work together for each other, working hard, communicating
- We had multiple people lifting a large rock and carrying it together
- Unique rules for shared goal. ie interviewing students
- Working as a part of the JRs leadership team

What inspired you to become a Jr. Ranger? What is your connection to the environment/ nature?

- I love being outside in nature
- My godmother used to be a ranger
- Both of my brothers did it and really enjoyed it; I love being outside
- I needed a job
- Being outside, having fun
- I really liked the idea of it and my friend said it was great. I respect and enjoy the outdoors
- Becoming a part of the OSMP! Such a great organization; being able to work with HS students
- My neighbor who was a JR inspired me
- I love to be outside and learn about the environment
- Meeting new people and helping out the community; I use open space daily as well as love the outdoors
- Connection to nature, experiential education and, outdoor-based learning
- When I was little, my nanny took me and my sisters for hikes and inspired me to become a JR

List one favorite activity you've had as a JR. Why is it your favorite?

- Team building activities, because building connection and interaction is what makes the job work
- EE's and our learning experiences while out on the field. For example, learning about Boulder history and wildlife
- Team building
- Team building
- Team building
- Potlucks because we all decide on a theme as a group and then collaborate to bring stuff to eat
- Working with FEMPStretch circle because the questions are always fun an interesting
- FEMP, osprey, farm work, IOM, seed collecting, ecology lesions
- Setting rocks



Group Questions

Four questions related to defining OSMP's goal were given to students. In groups of 3-4, Jr. Rangers read each question, discussed their ideas with one another, and then wrote their answers on sticky notes.

Question 1: Is it important to collect youth voice? Why or why not?

Written Answers

- It is important to collect youth's voice, because it gives a different perspective from a different group of people
- I do think it is important to collect youth voice because they will be the adults in the next 10 years or so. Also they may have a different point of view
- I think it is important to collect youth voice because it gives you a different point of view
- Absolutely! Youth voice is important because we have so much to offer. Growing up you learn so much. It is virtual we can share with everyone
- Yes because all voices matter, youth have passion for and unique sense of possibility
- Yes it is important to collect youth voice because we are just as large a part of the community as any other demographic and should have a say on what the community decides
- Yes, because we are the future of Boulder. Our opinions are the ways that we want Boulder to change or represent the things we appreciate about our home

Oral Answers

- Yes! We have a lot to offer. Good to be a part of community
- Youth is the future! We are the ones who will be living here
- Decisions affecting us directly. We are the most qualified to have a say



Question 2: In what ways do you feel that youth get to express their opinions?

Written Answers

- Art seems to be a strong medium by which to express ideas (graffiti?)
- Not sure if there are a lot of opportunities for youth to express ideas... only when expressly asked, as in a workshop like this
- Many youth express opinions and ideas through social media, mainly opinions on current events
- Art, some kids' art is put on display in the library
- What happened to school newspapers?
- I believe that youth get to express their opinions and ideas mostly through writing, and that's because it is hard for them to find a way to express themselves in other ways
- Primarily through writing or art - but there are times where verbal expression is strong- when person(s) are passionate about a case, acting out or staging protests, etc.
- We can express our opinions to our friends, or people we know like family. Many people express themselves through art, music, etc.
- I feel that youth get to express their opinions verbally because people who will listen can take the youth opinion into consideration
- Through their actions
- Avenues for youth expression... Art, sports, fundraising, social media but not so often verbally
- I feel that youth can express our opinions and thoughts by saying our opinions normally in adult way. But our opinions are usually not taken seriously

Oral Answers

- Stems out of your passion. Outreach is to peers/settings where our peers are.
- School/social media
- More important that it is utilized and resulted in change. Cause --> Effect (Adults want this too)

Question 3: In what settings are youth asked to share their voices?

Written Answers

- Encouraging youth to find opportunities/clubs that challenge and encourage you to do so
- Jr. Rangers within OSMP
- Peer groups
- Socratic seminar
- Nieb @ Fairview
- Often times youth are encouraged to share their voices in school to promote change in student council or in clubs, and in their community when volunteering - as well as JR - LA/Debate/Art
- Youth are asked to share their voice mainly at school. If a student feels more comfortable they will be more likely to share.
- Junior Rangers provides an outlet for youth to be a part of the community
- Characteristics of a comfortable sharing environment: inclusion, openness, no judgment, trusting
- Volunteer work seems to be a large way students contribute
- Junior Rangers when the leaders ask us what we want to do or what we think
- Student council and other student run clubs
- Student run clubs, such as student council
- Settings: schools, clubs, families, youth groups, church, community service
- Within Junior Rangers. Schools pretend to want our opinions but at the end of the day, it is out of our hands. Students or youth actually voice our opinions

Oral Answers

- Schools and student lead groups
- Church - as young as twelve years of age have a voice in the meetings. A lot of youth attend as a result
- Junior Rangers - Leaders ask them “What do YOU think needs to get done?” - new perspectives



Question 4: What are some examples of when sharing your voice mattered?

Written Answers

- In high school, I was on the debate team and it really made me focus on sharing my ideas and verbalizing them
- Outside of groups focused to youth, youth are dismissed due to age
- Many jobs I have had since graduating college... I have been given the chance to share ideas and plan activities
- N/A
- Discussions with my teachers about my education. With what worked and didn't work for me.
- Junior Rangers is one of the only places where I feel our opinions matter. We get to choose when we think a project needs to get done. Of course; my thoughts matter at home, but virtually nowhere else in society.
- Peer groups - youth clubs and activities
- Groups facilitated with the intention of youth leadership (clubs)
- In a family when making family decisions
- Peer led groups
- School - boycotts, petitions, program changes, food, uniforms
- Personal art
- Sports

Oral Answers

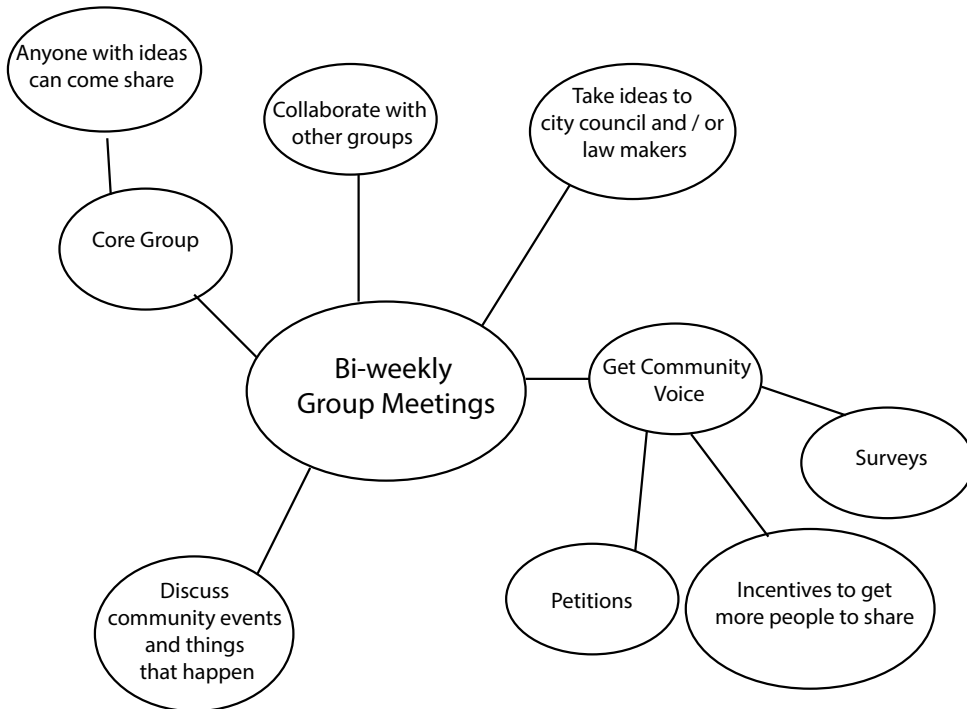
- Family was very open and receptive to what children have to say. But time and place for opinions are limited
- School is a big opportunity. Impact how the school is run
- Sports teams
- All clubs are student lead at school. Cool to see what other groups are doing. (ex. Theater)



Small Group Work

Students were asked to design a structure for a Teen Advisory Group. Designs were to include the structure type, group size, role/purpose, meeting frequency, community outreach opportunities, engagements with the city, and possible collaboration with other groups and ages.

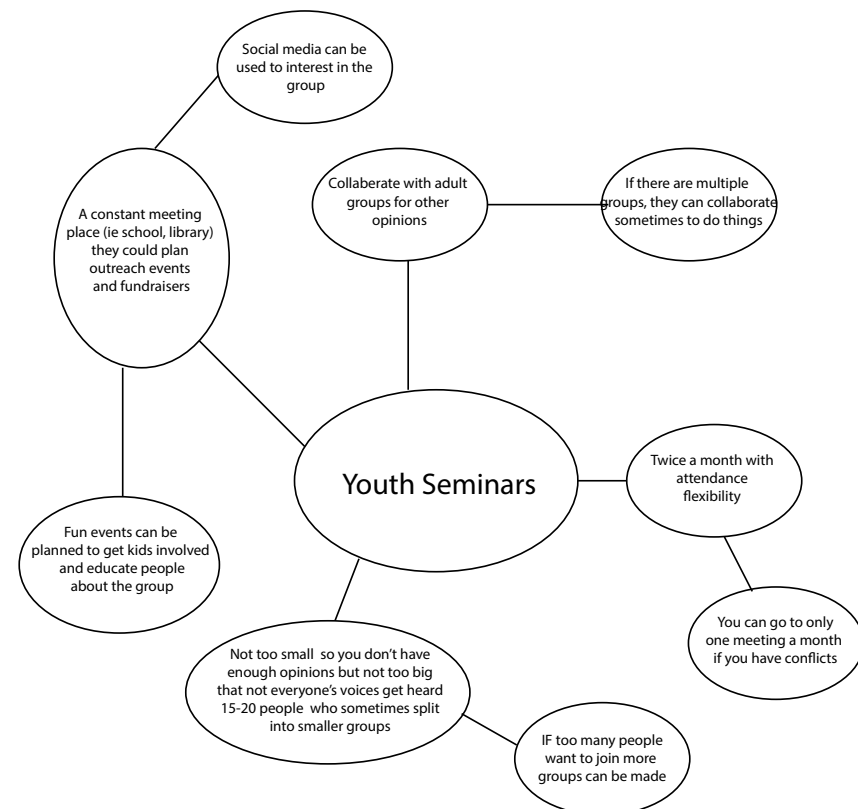
Group 1: Bi-Weekly Group Meetings



Themes

- Inclusive group
- Community voice
- Bi-weekly meetings
- Petitioning, surveys, and discussion
- Idea proposal
- Community incentives
- Group collaboration

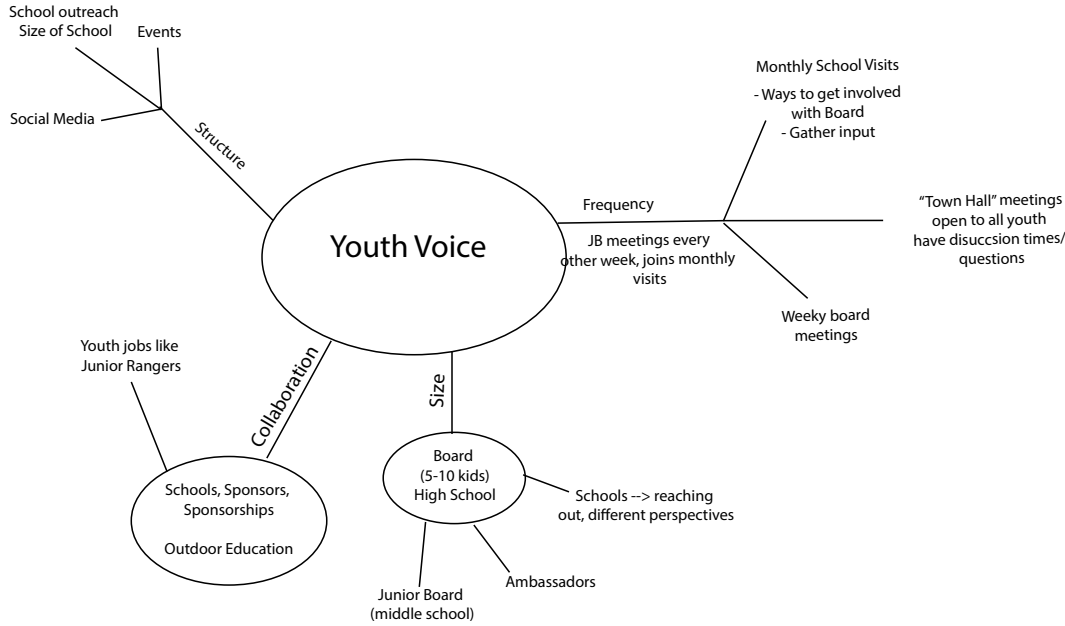
Group 2: Youth Seminar



Themes

- Youth Seminars
- 15-20 participants
- Collaborate with adults
- Bi-weekly meeting held in a common location
- Activities for youth
- Promoting through social media
- Ability to expand based on demand of participants

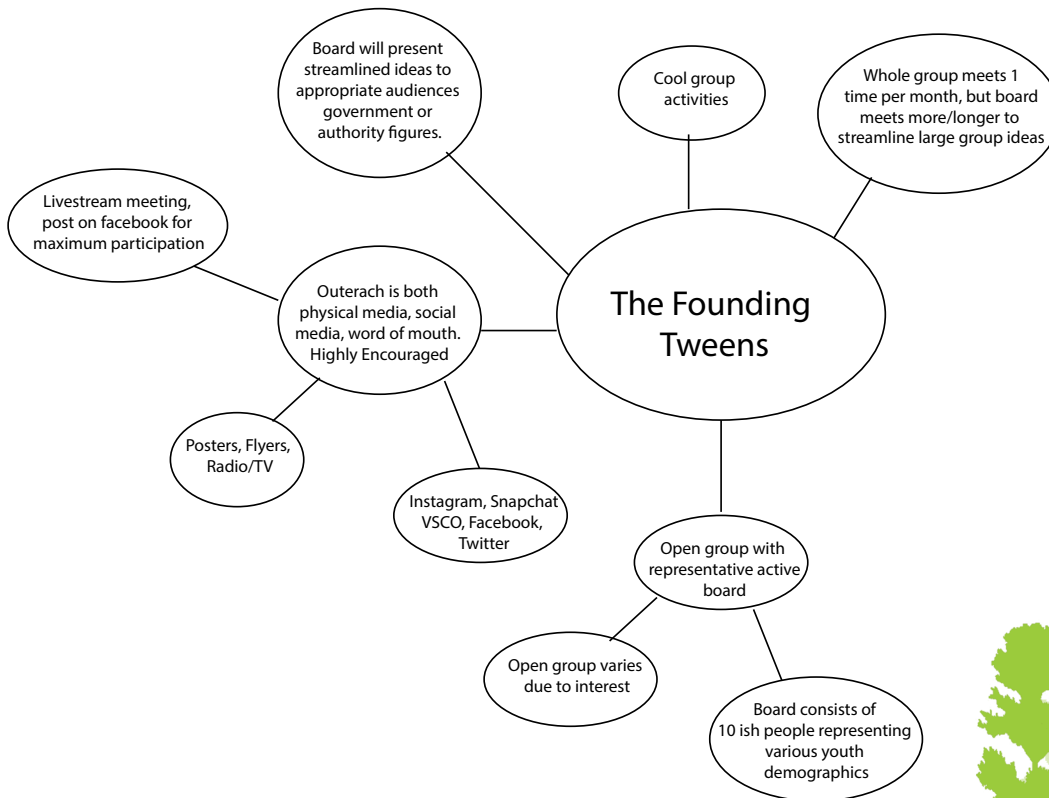
Group 3: Youth Voice



Themes

- Expressing Youth voice
- 5-10 High School youth
- Incorporation of Middle school youth
- Youth outreach
- Weekly meeting for High school youth
- Bi-weekly meetings for Middle school
- Town Hall meetings
- Discussion
- Outdoor Education
- School Sponsors

Group 4: Founding Tweens



Themes

- The Founding Tweens
- 10 person board
- Expression of Innovative ideas
- Bi-weekly meetings
- Live Facebook meetings
- Incorporating social media for outreach
- Physical advertisement
- Community involvement



Group 5: Meeting Board

Themes

- 1 Meeting Board Makes Survey
 - 2 Every student fills out survey
 - 3 MB collects results
 - 4 Collect majority and summarize
- Meeting Board
 - 30 participants
 - Monthly meetings in a common location
 - Student outreach
 - Opportunities for community service and volunteer programs
 - Surveying for student ideas



Feedback

The students provided feedback for the GUB Staff about the focus group process in the form of what they would like to keep and what they would recommend changing.

Keep

- Great questions and elaborate prompts in small groups
- I really like this meeting and appreciate how you are getting our input for this. Liked how we created our own plans
- Nice tie-ins from initial questions to designing structure
- It was great to discuss my ideas and also collaborate about youth voice. Thank you for coming
- I liked the interest in our opinions and what we wanted to do
- I think that this went well, because everyone had a chance to give their opinions and ideas
- It was interesting to learn about his program and have a say in it
- I got to hear everyone's voices and opinions
- Explanations, system, team work, positive attitude
- Strong points of discussion that was led well
- I love the idea of a youth board and I appreciate you guys putting this together, all good nothing bad
- The well structured and planned ideas that built as activities progressed along
- It was fun, great setup! Thank you for listening to us.

Change

- It would be good to have more time to share/collaborate our own plans
- Potential to add in more embodied exploration/emotional aspect to make more holistic in terms of learning and buy in
- Some of the time things had to little time. I couldn't write my whole thought down
- I think we spent a little less time than we should have on some activities
- Explain a little more about how your work works and where your overall goal is leading and how close are you to reaching it.