



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR - YOUTHACT

2016 RUNNER UP - BEST MODERATION STRATEGY

IDEASCALE



Department of Labor

Engaging Youth in Planning

The United States Department of Labor is a cabinet-level department of the U.S. federal government responsible for occupational safety, wage and hour standards, unemployment insurance benefits, re-employment services, and more. One of the policy agencies within DOL is the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which aims to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Hosted in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Youth Team and the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth), the YouthACT online dialogue provided a four-day period, **from May 19 through May 22, 2016, for youth and young adults with disabilities to discuss an important topic: what they need in order to become successful adults.** During the dialogue young adults with disabilities shared supports and strategies they find useful in their lives. Conversation topics included actions that people have taken that helped them achieve success and what things they think could further support them as they become successful adults. These insights and perspectives will help policymakers and people who work with youth to better understand what supports youth need to become successful adults.

This online event was open to the general public and to anyone interested in joining the conversation. The target group was youth between the ages of 13 and 25. Given the dialogue's focus, youth with disabilities and their allies were especially encouraged to participate.

In order to engage a broad range of participants in the ePolicyWorks online dialogues, the team used a multitude of strategic outreach efforts. At the start of every dialogue, **initial outreach emails are sent to experts and key stakeholders relevant to the dialogue topic.** In addition, emails are sent to the **complete ePolicyWorks distribution list**, which includes previous online dialogue invitees and ePolicyWorks Collaborative Workspace members. To focus the conversation for this specific dialogue, the ePolicyWorks team **researched targeted organizations, including disability and youth advocacy organizations, and customized the correspondences to them.**

Throughout the dialogue, the ePolicyWorks team sent **follow-up reminder emails** to ensure that everyone interested in participating in the online dialogue had the chance to do so before the dialogue closed. At the conclusion of the dialogue, a **thank you email** was sent to all participants with an invitation to stay tuned for future dialogues. You can see the email schedule below:

- Initial Announcement Email 1 – 5/17/16
 - This email announcing the start of the dialogue and personally inviting participants was **sent to previous dialogue participants.**
- Initial Announcement Email 2 – 5/17/16
 - This email announcing the start of the dialogue and personally inviting participants was **sent to disability bloggers and disability and youth advocacy organizations.**

- Dialogue Open Announcement Email 1 – 5/19/16
 - This email announcing the start of the dialogue was **sent to people who were already registered to participate.**
- Dialogue Open Announcement Email 2 – 5/19/16
 - This email announcing the start of the dialogue was **sent to ePolicyWorks contacts** who were not yet registered to participate.
- Dialogue Participation Reminder Email – 5/20/16
 - This email was sent to all current dialogue registrants to **encourage them to return to the dialogue** to contribute more ideas, votes and comments.
- Dialogue Participation Reminder Email – 5/21/16
 - This email was sent to disability bloggers and disability and youth advocacy organizations to **encourage dialogue participation and spreading the word.**
- Last Day of Dialogue Reminder Email – 5/22/16
 - This email was sent to dialogue registrants to **encourage participation before the dialogue closed.**
- Participation Thank You Email – 5/23/16
 - This email was **sent to all dialogue registrants to thank them for their contributions** to the dialogue.

Here is an excerpt from a sample email:

An online dialogue is a way for people from all over the country to talk online and share ideas about a particular issue. It's like a discussion board or a chat room where you can post, comment on and vote for new and exciting ideas.

In this online dialogue, youth and young adults with disabilities are discussing a pretty important topic – what they need in order to become successful adults. We hope you will join the conversation and add your ideas, votes and comments.

You can start by considering this one big question:

*What ideas do you have about what would help you and your peers become successful adults?
(select link to answer)*

In short, over the course of eight email blasts, ePolicyworks team noted:

- Over **10,000 delivered emails**
- a **26% open rate**
- over **700 unique clicks to the community site.**

Other channels included events, meetings, blog posts, newsletter posts, social media outreach and promotion on the website.

In addition to targeted email blasts, the ePolicyWorks team conducted outreach using **social media through Twitter**. This outreach tactic proved especially effective, as the dialogue was directed toward youth with disabilities, among whom social media use is quite popular. In the week leading up to the dialogue, **four general announcement Tweets about the dialogue were posted**. The day before the dialogue opened, ePolicyWorks **sent direct tweets to the 45 prominent disability organizations and respected disability leaders**.

In addition to the above noted efforts, **eight original tweets were posted throughout the course of the four day event**, with 20 retweets, and @ePolicyWorks re-tweeted seven announcements from other accounts about the dialogue. The targeted social media outreach contributed to a significant increase of dialogue promotion on social media and by directing interested people and organizations to register for the dialogue. In total, **twenty-two percent of new visitors to the dialogue came from social media**.

Moderators also played a very important role in helping to host the online dialogue. ODEP looks to **moderators to help start the conversation, keep it going, and guide participants as they contribute**. Their job is to invite people to participate in a respectful way, comment on the ideas shared by participants to encourage active participation, and help participants share more details about their ideas.

Moderators have three main tasks to focus on:

1. **Recognizing**. It is important to recognize individual participants by directly mentioning their comments in your responses as a way to demonstrate that their participation is welcomed and valuable.
2. **Prompting**. Help participants stay on topic by prompting them to add a comment with more details about their ideas and providing reminders of the main topic of the online conversation. This will help encourage further conversation from participants.
3. **Assessing**. Read comments to assess whether they are on topic and appropriate. This is a very important part of being a moderator.

Once an idea is submitted, it is automatically posted and it is the moderator's job to engage with the dialogue participant by using one or more of the techniques listed above. Relevant ideas should always receive recognition. For example, moderators can say "thank you for your input" or "thank you for this thought-provoking idea." **Recognition tells participants that they have been heard, serves as an ice-breaker for further discussion from others or additional input from the person who originally submitted the idea or comment.**

If an idea requires some refinement such as an idea that gives opinions and suggestions in the form of personal stories, **it is the moderator's job to prompt participants for further details to determine if the participant's story can be connected to the purpose of the dialogue**. Moderators should use their expertise to help guide the discussion. When prompting, moderators should thank participants for their comments but also gently remind them of the focus of the online dialogue and prompt them to focus on responding to the dialogue question.

Finally, moderators are responsible for assessing all ideas in order to help keep the conversation on-topic and ensure that the rules of the dialogue are followed. If an idea is off-topic, it is possible for a moderator to move ideas to a section of the dialogue titled “Additional Input” where they will be saved without being part of the main dialogue. If a moderator moves an idea, it is a good idea to thank the submitter for their input and let them know that because their idea did not directly relate to the goals of the conversion it has been moved to “Additional Input” for further review.

In addition, moderators must instantly delete ideas or comments that contain personal attacks, obvious advertising, or inappropriate language. Furthermore, if a participant includes personal information such as social security numbers, names, or addresses in a comment, moderators should edit or delete all personal details and write a response explaining why, such as: “John Smith thank you for your comment. We found it necessary to delete your personal information for your security.”

Hosted over a short, four-day period, **452 participants contributed 74 ideas, 347 comments and 609 votes.** Additionally, the YouthACT program reported

- **760 unique visitors of which 95% completed registration and 27% of which were active registrants** (submitted ideas, votes or comments)
- Visitors looked at **more than 8 pages per visit and spent upwards of ten minutes** on the site.
- Almost **50% of all visitors returned to the site**

As part of the registration process, participants were asked to identify their age group (13-15, 16-18, 19-21, 22-25, 26-30 or other). It should be noted that though there were less participants in the age ranges between 13 to 30 years old, that they participated at a much higher rate, contributing more ideas, comments and votes, than those who identified themselves as “other.” In particular, **the age range from 13-15 had the fewest registered participants, but the second highest participation rate.**

Following the overwhelming success of the YouthACT Transition Truths National Online Dialogue, ODEP partnered with the National Endowment for the Arts to host another crowdsourcing event targeting youth and young adults with disabilities. This second dialogue titled Careers in the Arts, focused on increasing career opportunities for people with disabilities in the Arts. **The Careers in the Arts dialogue ran for two weeks from June 6 until June 19, 2016 engaging more than 400 individuals to share 112 ideas. ePolicyWorks utilized the successful techniques from the YouthACT Transition Truths National Online Dialogue to ensure that youth and young adults with disabilities had the opportunity to share their ideas, comments, and votes during the event.** This included social media and targeted outreach to stakeholder groups and youth-based organizations.