

The National Association of Teen Institutes Teen Institute Model Framework

Teen Institutes are comprehensive programs designed to train, mobilize and empower youth to prevent the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and self-destructive behaviors in themselves and their peers. Teen Institutes emphasize peer leadership and positive life skills development. There are Teen Institute programs for middle school and high school aged youth, and, in recent years, the model has been applied to elementary and college aged youth also.

The critical elements in the Teen Institute model are based on Icek Ajzen's (1988, 1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which says that human action is guided by five constructs: behavioral beliefs; attitudes; normative beliefs; control beliefs; and perceived control. According to Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), increasing knowledge alone does not help to change behavior much. Youth programs seeking to change behaviors must focus on attitudes, perceived norms and control in making the change to have better results.

Model Framework: Programs identified as "Teen Institutes" (whether called that or not) must offer certain elements considered critical to the fidelity and success of the model. These elements may differ from program to program in subtle ways that make each program unique, but the basic framework is what makes a program a Teen Institute and contributes significantly to the development of the desired TPB constructs. The Teen Institute Framework includes the following mandatory elements:

- **An All-Encompassing Focus on Healthy Beliefs and Clear Standards**
 - General sessions and workshops provide motivational messages about healthy lifestyle choices, practicing restraint, making a difference in one's community and having a positive vision for the future.
 - Programs focus on acceptance, diversity and feeling comfortable with oneself.
 - Required and elective workshops are conducted that educate youth about current health, wellness and safety issues pertinent to them and their peers, with a strong emphasis on alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and violence.
 - Participants learn peer-focused prevention, safety and wellness strategies that they can implement when they return home.
 - Staff members receive training that emphasizes strategies for positive youth development and empowerment.

- **Opportunities for Pro-Social Bonding, Attachment and Commitment**
 - Programs that are designed for teams conduct daily team meetings and provide team-building activities to increase group cohesion, bonding and commitment.
 - Programs designed for individuals encourage group formation based on geographic areas, common interests or other criteria, while providing

opportunities for self-discovery and the development of commitment to applying peer leadership skills in one's school or community.

- All Teen Institute programs incorporate small discussion groups that meet regularly to get to know one another, reflect on or process events, develop an appreciation of diversity and share normative beliefs. These groups incorporate bonding activities and encourage youth participants to step outside their comfort zones in making new friends.

- **Life Skills Training for Healthy Lifestyle Choices**

- All Teen Institutes incorporate life skills and peer leadership training. Some programs use evidence-based packaged curricula. Some apply the standards of the National Association of Peer Programs into their workshops, training sessions and experiences to assure life skills training is infused into the program. Still others have developed their own curriculum.
- Regardless of which training is used, the constant is that life skills training is experiential and incorporated into many elements of the Teen Institute experience.
- Outcomes are evaluated through pre/post tests and observation.
- Opportunities to apply life skills are provided during Teen Institute programs, and youth are encouraged to actively apply them after the program is over.
- Programs may utilize peer leaders to conduct life skills training.

- **Meaningful Opportunities to Participate Actively**

- All Teen Institutes involve participants in a strategic planning process with the specific intent that plans of action developed during the program will act as catalysts for continued involvement in pro-social, peer leadership activities in one's school and/or community.
- Strategic planning involves assessment of needs and identification of peer-focused prevention and community service strategies that individual youth and/or youth action teams will implement in their schools and communities.
- Follow-up assures that strategic plans are implemented or revised. Follow-up services may include technical assistance, resources, action alerts, regional retreats, additional leadership and/or prevention strategies training, community service events and reunions. Follow-up is provided throughout the year to teams, adult advisors and individual participants.
- Teen Institutes have opportunities for youth who have participated in the program to serve as youth advisors or youth staff in subsequent years. Youth are involved in planning and evaluating programs, developing and leading workshops and general sessions, facilitating small discussion groups and team meetings, providing staff support at other functions throughout the year and other duties as identified by the individual programs. It is not unusual for programs to have young people serve in these positions for several years after they have participated in a Teen Institute.

- Teen Institutes actively encourage community service and involvement in one's school and community.
- Many Teen Institutes provide on-site opportunities to engage in service projects during the Institute.
- **Recognition and Reinforcement for Learning and Applying Life Skills**
 - Teen Institute programs provide opportunities for recognition and reinforcement for participants learning and applying life skills that must include at least one of the following:
 - Newsletters that highlight actions taken by individuals and teams in their home schools and communities as a result of their Teen Institute experiences.
 - Recognition of youth participants who demonstrate interest and leadership skills by selecting them to serve as youth staff in subsequent programs or as members of youth advisory committees to help evaluate and plan programs.
 - Provision of awards based on actions taken by participants and/or teams as a result of their Teen Institute experiences.
 - Training or guidance on how to write press releases and establish relationships with their local media.
 - Provision of information to youth participants about opportunities to apply for scholarships, participate in essay or other contests or participate in other recognition events for their prevention and community service activities.
 - Opportunities for participants to attend state and/or national conferences, such as the NATI annual conference.

Highlighted below are other elements that are not required, but that add to the Teen Institute experience include:

- A majority of the Teen Institute programs have a residential component, providing an intensive experience over three to seven days. Those that are not residential must assure that the critical elements outlined above are provided during regular meetings and training events and many incorporate overnight retreats.
- Alternative activities are usually provided during residential Teen Institute programs or are incorporated periodically into non-residential programs. They are strongly encouraged for all programs to incorporate in one way or another. These may include traditional camp activities, social events, visual arts, performing arts, sports, recreational activities, new games and other drug-free activities that meet the social needs of adolescents while promoting healthy lifestyle choices and drug-free leisure activities.

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