



Board and Commission Study Issue Form

The Study Issues process is designed to assist City Council with setting priorities for the coming calendar year. Board and commission members have two roles in this process:

1. To advise Council regarding the identification of policy issues to study, within their relevant area of authority;
2. To advise Council on those issues Council has decided to study.

The study issues process should focus on considering a new or revised ordinance, new or expanded service delivery program, changes to existing Council Policy, or amendments to the General Plan. The Study Issues Form is designed to focus board and commissioner members' ideas on potential policy study issues, and provide the opportunity for staff feedback and guidance in a transparent process. *Board members or commissioners may only fill out a form for study issue ideas within their purview.*

Date Submitted to Staff Liaison:

Board/ Commission: Human Relations Commission



Submitted by: Esther Rosenfeld

Study Issue Working Title:

Exploring Youth Representation on City Commissions

1. What are the key elements of the issue? What precipitated this study?

This issue was raised due to the lack of meaningful youth representation on city commissions and the barriers preventing youth from participating. Most commissions have four-year terms, which are inaccessible for high school students who can realistically serve only 1-2 years before graduating or moving away. As a result, even qualified youth who apply often serve partial terms or are discouraged from applying at all. Additionally, the application process is not well publicized to young people; many are unaware that they're even eligible. This lack of outreach and structural flexibility creates an equity gap and leaves out youth voices on issues that directly affect them. For example, youth are on the front lines of conversations around transportation, public safety, climate, and education equity, yet are rarely involved in the decision-making process. A study is needed to examine how the City can expand youth participation in a sustainable way. Key questions include: Should commissions be required to offer dedicated youth seats with shorter terms (e.g., 1-2 years)? How can the City conduct more effective outreach to ensure diverse youth applicants? How does youth input improve the work of advisory bodies, especially those focused on equity and inclusion? Many youth are eager to contribute, but face barriers. This study would evaluate policy options to remove those barriers and create accessible pathways for youth civic engagement across eligible city commissions.

2. Staff Summary of Scope and/or Comments: [Staff Use Only]

Currently, Sunnyvale does not have a formal process or policy to ensure youth representation on City commissions. While there is interest in expanding youth participation, existing structural and practical limitations present challenges that may reduce the feasibility and effectiveness of a formal study at this time.

Most commissions have four-year terms, which may not align with the availability of high school students who can often commit to one to two years before graduating or moving away. Eligibility requirements for charter-formed commissions require appointees to be registered voters, typically requiring them to be at least 18 years old. Residency requirements further restrict participation, as most commissions require members to live in Sunnyvale, with only a few exceptions such as the Human Relations Commission, Sustainability Commission, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission.

While youth engagement in civic affairs can offer some benefits and fresh perspectives, past experience suggests that youth commissioners may struggle with consistent attendance due to academic responsibilities, transportation barriers, or family obligations. Also, some commissions require subject-matter expertise that may not align with the typical experience of high school students, potentially necessitating additional staff time for orientation, training or mentorship.

Alternatives to a Study Issue may include continuing to promote the Youth Advisory Council as a platform for youth engagement and encouraging commissions to seek input from youth on an ad hoc basis particularly on issues where their perspectives are most relevant. Existing appointment processes already allow for youth applications where eligibility permits, and further emphasis could be placed on outreach without requiring structural changes or policy development.

Also, this topic will be addressed by the City Council during its November meeting, when options for expanding youth participation and creating more accessible pathways for civic engagement will be considered.