**MY-CIL** Minority Youth and Centers for Independent Living (MY-CIL)

# MY-CIL Practice Brief #6

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## Ways CILs Can Conduct Effective Outreach to Youth with Disabilities from Minority Backgrounds: Focus Group Findings

**About the MY-CIL Project.** Minority Youth and Centers for Independent Living (MY-CIL) is a collaborative effort of Hunter College; the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York; Independent Living Research Utilization; and Mathematica. The Administration for Community Living's National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and the Office of Independent Living Programs funded MY-CIL to improve outcomes for out-of-school youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) with disabilities. Specifically, the project seeks to produce and share knowledge that empowers Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with significant disabilities from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

### Clarifying terms

**Youth from minority backgrounds.** MY-CIL uses the term *youth from minority backgrounds* to refer to transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups.

**Out-of-school youth (OSY) with disabilities.** MY-CIL uses the term *OSY* to refer to transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

**In this brief:** This brief highlights ways that CILs can conduct effective outreach for OSY with disabilities who come from minority backgrounds. We conducted three virtual focus groups with OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds to learn how CILs can improve their outreach and programs for this population. Conducted over Zoom in June 2022, each focus group included 7 to 10 participants who lived in Illinois, New York City, or South Carolina.

### Focus group methods and recruitment strategies

We partnered with three CILs—Southern Illinois CIL, Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York; and Able South Carolina—to recruit OSY from minority backgrounds for the focus groups. We recruited 10 participants for the Illinois focus group, 7 participants for the New York City focus group, and 9 participants for the South Carolina focus group. See Table 1 for more information on the participants.

**Table 1. Self-reported characteristics of focus group participants**

| Characteristic | Number of focus group participants |
|---|---|
| Age | |
| 18 to 21 | 11 |
| 22 to 24 | 15 |
| Race and ethnicity | |
| Black or African American | 18 |
| Asian | 1 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 3 |
| Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 3 |
| Hispanic (including persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American origin) | 2 |
| Gender | |
| Female | 9 |
| Male | 17 |

Note: Data on race and ethnicity come from participants' responses to the online screening survey. Data on age and gender come from participants' responses during screening phone calls. Categories for race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive.

# Findings

In this section we highlight participants' perspectives on ways that CILs can conduct effective outreach with youth with disabilities from minority backgrounds.

## Ways CILs can conduct more effective outreach

Focus group participants described outreach methods that CILs could use to increase interest and participation from youth with disabilities who come from minority backgrounds.

### *How do youth learn about independent living resources and opportunities?*

Most participants shared that they rely on social media, including Facebook and Twitter, for information about groups and activities in their community. Participants discussed using social media for a variety of purposes: to receive words of encouragement, find more information about disability studies or groups to participate in, and befriend other people with disabilities. CILs can meet youth where they already are by posting on social media and on their websites, including updates and information about how to join programs and activities.

Many participants also hear about community organizations from friends, family, church members, caregivers, or doctors. If those trusted sources provide a reference to an activity or organization, participants indicated they were more likely to attend.

### *What key information do youth want to know before joining a CIL group, program, or activity?*

Participants want to know what they are signing up for, if it will be worth their time, and if they can feasibly attend. Flyers, invitations, and other informational materials for programs and activities should include this key information and proactively address potential concerns or barriers.

Participants highlighted that they want to know upfront the focus of the meeting, including the specific skills they might learn or improve and the resources they can access, such as financial resources, mentorship opportunities, individualized support, or links to other community organizations that provide mental health support and social services.

A few participants said they cross-reference a variety of sources before choosing to join a new group or activity. Participants might do their own research on the internet, including on social media and the CIL's website, ask friends who might have some familiarity, or talk to staff or other people who attend the group. For this reason, CILs might consider featuring quotes from current consumers in program materials to give potential participants more information about what the group can offer, from a peer's perspective.

> *"So first of all, before I join an organization, I gather information from different sources so that I know exactly what to expect and be sure if that is what I want, maybe to learn or participate in by joining the group. So, I can go to maybe the website and check people's reviews or what mainly it is about. I can also talk to people who are in the organization, that can be the staff, or even talking to the other members so that I can compare the information and see if the information is matching, and from there now I can decide if this group will be of help to me."*
>
> <div align="right">(Focus group participant, age 23)</div>

Several participants mentioned that it is helpful to know if the meeting will be held virtually or in person to plan around accessibility issues. Participants shared that virtual meetings have helped them connect with others, particularly during the pandemic. Virtual meetings also help eliminate transportation issues and accessibility barriers related to attending meetings in person. For in-person meetings, participants noted that providing transportation or sharing information about transportation would make it more feasible for them to participate. In large service areas where coordinating door-to-door transportation is not feasible, making programs available virtually, in addition to in person, would also extend the reach of the program.

A few participants also shared that they have felt excluded from activities like swimming at the beach or playing soccer because they could not participate. It is important for CILs to communicate available accommodations to ensure activities will be accessible to everyone.

Providing a small incentive for attending, such as a gift card or refreshments, might boost interest. For example, one participant shared that an organization offered a gift card if group members brought someone new to a meeting. Many participants reported they would be more willing to try a new group if a friend invited them, so this could be a good strategy for CILs to consider. Alternatively, CILs could enter first-time attendees into a drawing for a door prize.

## *Key takeaways*

- **Share clear information about programs and activities on social media platforms, CIL websites, and with community partners.**
- **Center the content, structure, and purpose of meetings, programs, and activities in outreach materials.** Highlight transportation options and meeting accommodations.
- **Note any small incentives for participation,** such as refreshments or a gift card.

## Discussion

CIL staff interested in connecting with youth from minority backgrounds might consider assessing and strengthening their outreach strategies. Despite finding out about the focus group over social media, presumably through CILs' own social media accounts, most focus group participants had never participated in CIL programs or activities. This suggests that CILs have a broader social media reach beyond their established consumer base, which they can use to reach more OSY. CILs should ensure their social media and websites include clear information about groups and activities, including how youth can speak to someone to learn more. Social media is also an opportunity for engagement through interactions on posts. CILs could ask people to comment with a fun fact or answer a question (for example, what is your favorite snack?) to start building connections with users across the CIL's social media network. To expand their reach, CILs can make posts accessible to community partners and encourage consumers to bring a friend to a new group or activity.

### Interested in other focus group findings?

To learn more about **techniques for sustaining engagement** of out-of-school youth from minority backgrounds, see MY-CIL Practice Brief #7: Ways CILs Can Sustain Engagement of Youth with Disabilities from Minority Backgrounds.

To learn more about **recommendations for CIL programs and activities**, see MY-CIL Practice Brief #8: Program and Activity Recommendations for CILs Working with Youth with Disabilities from Minority Backgrounds.

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## About the Authors of This Brief

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