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Better Your Brand and Business: Create a Teen Council



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This guide provides an overview of the creation of Microsoft's first-ever Online Safety teen council. Known as the Microsoft Council for Digital Good (CDG), we assembled a group of teens to grow positive online interactions and offer insights into this new generation's use of technology.

In the following pages, you'll learn how we built this inaugural Council and how you might replicate something similar for your business or cause. The CDG contributed to multiple projects throughout its 18-month term, including providing feedback to Microsoft partners and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) about forthcoming initiatives and campaigns, sharing insights with product and business groups, traveling to corporate headquarters and Washington, D.C., for Council engagements, and drafting, among other assignments, an open letter to law and policymakers in the U.S. about working together to improve life online.

Coupled with Microsoft's research and work in fostering [Digital Civility](#), the Council provided a wealth of insights and garnered significant interest and accolades from government, industry and civil society. These teens well-surpassed our expectations in their maturity and candidness when speaking about issues they face online every day.

The success of our inaugural Council in the U.S. led to the creation of a "sister" European Council for Digital Good organized by the creator of international Safer Internet Day (SID), as well as two additional regional Microsoft Councils: the Arab Council for Digital Good and the African Council for Digital Good. Given the interest and impact of the program, we wanted to create a short guide to share with others what we did and how we did it in an effort to pave the way for more such impactful programs featuring youth. We hope you will consider investing and, if you do, note that the benefits go well beyond the obvious business and reputational impacts that can be gained by engaging the generation of tomorrow.

Jacqueline Beauchere Chief Online Safety Officer
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Establishing a youth Council for Digital Good

Overview

In August 2017, Microsoft hosted in Redmond a two-day Summit of its inaugural Council for Digital Good (CDG)—15 teens from across the U.S., interested in making online interactions safer and healthier for everyone. The Summit, which also included one parent or chaperone per teen, provided valuable insights and led to subsequent engagements and activities with young people across the globe.

After the success of the U.S. Council and Summit, a vision for a global Council was born. We compiled this “playbook” to help guide others interested in creating their own Councils. We hope the program’s demonstrated impact on Council members, parents/chaperones, home communities and among policymakers and influencers, will inspire others to pursue a Council within their company, organization or region. Then, as more local Councils are developed, we strive to one day bring together teen representatives from regional and affiliated Councils for a Global Summit.

Please review the information below and the embedded links for guidance about launching and organizing a Council for Digital Good within your company or organization.

Who should consider creating a CDG?

Microsoft Online Safety launched the pilot U.S. CDG given the Council’s focus on “life online.” The primary motivation was to learn more about what young people are doing online, to solicit their views about making online interactions safer and healthier, and to encourage **“digital civility”**—leading and acting with empathy, compassion and kindness in all online interactions.

The Council is an effective program to discuss with policymakers, given the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**. Although the Convention is obviously geared toward nation states, companies and organizations can contribute to these dialogues, as we

involve youth and teens and share Council learnings and experiences. In addition, the Council members themselves garnered local and regional media coverage about their participation.

Companies thinking about creating a Council for Digital Good might include representatives from:

- Government Affairs
- Philanthropies
- Public Relations / Public Affairs
- Public Sector, and
- Education / Public Sector

Creating a Council for Digital Good

Creating the inaugural Council for Digital Good involved several phases – from the application and selection process through development of the Summit agenda, on-site activities and follow-on projects. Each of these is briefly summarized below, and some key points of guidance are offered. Where materials were created, links are provided as examples or templates.

Application process

For the inaugural Council for Digital Good, we knew we wanted to recruit a diverse group of teens from as many U.S. states as possible. We created an online application complete with three essay-type questions:

- What are you, as a young person, doing online today?
- What are your views on Microsoft as a company?
- What are your expectations for the Council experience should you be selected?

We then promoted the application process through [this blog post](#), via our relevant social media channels and through youth-focused NGOs and other organizations. We also leveraged external speaking opportunities to promote the application process, including Safer Internet Day in February. Applicants were able to submit their answers in writing, or by creating short videos. We found the videos to be a dynamic way to get a sense of

each applicant. (Of course, involve your privacy and legal teams to ensure appropriate data-collection and data-handling practices.)

Council selection

A small group of Microsoft personnel that would be involved in the Summit and ongoing work of the Council made up the selection team.

This group reviewed applications individually, with each team member noting individual selections and standout applications. We then came together as a group and compared notes. Selection criteria

included: geographic location, online involvement/activities, age, gender, and exposure to/concern about key online safety issues, including online bullying, harassment and the proliferation of hate speech. It was paramount that the Council be diverse across each of these criteria to create balanced and representative insights.



We received hundreds of applicants and selected Council members were informed via an individual email and more generally [via this blog post](#). (This blog post was geared more toward informing unsuccessful applicants that the process was in fact concluded.) In the email, we asked those selected to notify us immediately of their acceptance and to confirm that they had their parents' permission to participate.

Pre-Summit activities

Once Council members were selected, we asked them to complete comprehensive paperwork, including:

Council Member and Parent/Legal Guardian Releases - Signed by both the Council member and (if the member is a minor) a parent/legal guardian ("Parent"):

- **Copyright, Privacy and Publicity Rights** – If a Parent is participating in Council activities or communications, a release may also need to be provided for the Parent.
- **Travel and Activities Consent and Liability Waiver** – If the Council member is a minor, this waiver confirms that the Parent: (i) is legally authorized to travel with the Council member, and (ii) will be responsible for the safety and care of the Council member when traveling and participating in Council activities, including the Council member's conduct, and (iii) that the Parent is authorized to make decisions regarding the welfare of the Council member.

Travel Questionnaire – Completed by the Parent:

- Council member and Parent information (including passport/ID card, mobile phone numbers, emergency contacts, etc.)
- Travel Preferences (including any special requests or accommodations (e.g., dietary, physical, medical))
- Round-trip ground transportation to and from airport, hotel, etc.

Travel

We hired a local travel coordinator to handle flights and hotel accommodations for the Council members and their parents/chaperones. The travel company also arranged for transportation to/from both airports (as needed) for all attendees, as well as local and intra-campus transportation. Councils can certainly be formed that do not require overnight accommodations or air travel.

Logistics

- Provide the agenda well in advance of the Summit. Activities for parents/chaperones need to be planned around the Council member activities and ensure that parents/chaperones have learning activities as well. At our Summit, parents/chaperones were very eager to learn about online safety.

- We recommend that you assign a concierge-type person(s) to be available to assist Council members and parents/chaperones in the event issues may arise.
- Council members may have additional family members traveling with them. Consider how this may impact travel arrangements, costs, coordination of events, catering, building access, and on-site activities.
- If travel requires overnight stays, consider a small welcome gift for Council members in their hotel rooms. Also, include the agenda and instructions for transportation to the Summit, along with key contact names and numbers.

Substantive pre-Summit planning

We held 30- to 45-minute conference calls each month leading up to the August Summit. Each month's conference call built on the last and followed a specific agenda. For instance, the purpose of the first conference call (in May) was to "meet" each of the Council members and to share that we would be sending each of them a pre-Summit book to read. (Female Council members were sent "[Queenbees and Wannabees](#)" and male members were sent "[Masterminds and Wingmen](#)." We secured author Rosalind Wiseman as a guest speaker for the Summit; she addressed both the teens and the parents in two separate Summit sessions.) The pre-reading gave the Council members a shared experience upon which they could ground their discussions. Many had all family members read the book.



Other

We drafted and posted one, additional pre-Summit blog, "[Meet Microsoft's inaugural Council for Digital Good](#)," where we shared the names, ages and home states of each of the Council members, as well as the goals of the Summit and

other details. The aim was to keep the drumbeat going and to keep the Council members, parents/chaperones and influential observers interested in our progress.

At the Summit

Logistics

From experience, the following logistical considerations helped support the success of the Summit:

- Minimize movement during sessions and ensure that you have nearby space for the parents/chaperones. If movement to different locations is necessary, have a sufficient number of people guiding the Council members and parents/chaperones to their next meeting location, whether these be evening activities, day-time tours, presentations in different buildings, etc.
- Assign a concierge-type person(s) to be available to assist Council members and parents/chaperones with issues that may arise.
- Determine if any special requests or accommodations are needed for parents/chaperones [e.g., physical, technical (WiFi), etc.]
- Catering – Select meals and snacks that work well for both teens and adults, paying particular attention to special dietary needs.
- Do any Council members or chaperones require special accommodations?
- Do you need greeters to meet external speakers? What are the audio/visual requirements? If you have media staff on site (e.g., videographer) review their space requirements; video equipment can take up significant space in the room, which can be disruptive.



Substantive execution

We knew in advance that we wanted some discussions to be Council members only, so we developed a separate ***“parent/chaperone track”*** with activities and program elements geared solely to that group.

In addition to the substantive discussions, we also wanted to offer the teens a glimpse into life at a major multinational corporation. As part of the Day Two agenda, we held a 90-minute ***speed-mentoring session*** where Council members spent five minutes with each of 16 different Microsoft employees to learn about the employees’ roles and responsibilities. To ensure Council members got the most out of their five-minute speed-mentoring “rounds,” we supplied them in advance with a list of mentor biographies, so they could prepare a question or two for each mentor. Many Council members and parents noted this was one of their favorite parts of the Council Summit.

We prepared detailed discussion guides for each of the focus group-style discussions on Day One. After a round-robin of introductions, the theme for the morning of Day One was “The State of Online Interaction Today.” In the afternoon, discussions turned to “The State of Online Interactions Tomorrow.” In short, the morning session focused on what teens are doing online today: who they’re meeting, how they’re being treated, how they’re treating others. The afternoon session included topics like:

- What could make online life safer, healthier and more enjoyable?
- How do we encourage people to build each other up online instead of tearing them down?
- Who bears the most responsibility when it comes to keep kids and teens safe online?



Assignment

It was important to give the Council members an assignment and to ask

each of them to deliver a “work product” by the end of the Summit. This way, they felt accountable and invested in the Summit itself, and we were able to share tangible deliverables via our web properties and our blog. We carved out 90 minutes of quiet time on Day Two for Council members to draft their ***individual Manifestos*** for life online, 10-to-12-point written documents detailing the necessary skills, abilities and perspectives for safer and healthier online experiences.

Post-Summit activities

Immediately following the Summit, we drafted and posted our [Summit blog](#) and shared the link with Council members and parents/chaperones via email. In that same post-Summit mail, we asked both Council members and parents/chaperones to complete post-event surveys to help us improve future events.

Follow-on creative work

In the final minutes of the Summit and once each Council members delivered his/her individual Manifesto, we told Council members that we wanted them to create an artistic or pictorial representation of their individual Manifestos. This, we thought, would be a fun and creative project for the teens to work on before heading back to school. We mentioned some of the creative projects in our blogs, and featured all Council members’ works on our website. (See, [this link](#).)

Cohort project

Once the creative projects were complete, we assigned the teens the task of drafting one, singular Manifesto from the Council cohort. We saw this as a way for the Council to work together independently and to agree a set of online safety guidance for their peers and others. The collective project builds and expands on their individual efforts. Each teen contributed a rule or principle that could be followed to improve the online experience for all. (See, [this link](#).)

NGO and other external engagements

Throughout the Council program, NGOs, academics and even governments contacted us about engaging Council members for various

projects, input and feedback. The teen and youth voice is sought after for campaigns, messaging and policy positioning. We agreed to make the teens available on an ad hoc basis.

One of their interactions, included a call with another youth group in Europe. Shortly after the interaction, that group asked if it could be known as the “European Council for Digital Good,” to which we heartily agreed and now always refer to as a “sister” Council. (More on that group’s activities [here](#).)

In addition, one member served as the only youth representative on a panel as part of UNICEF/GSMA’s “Empowering Children in a Digital Age” conference in Washington, D.C. Another appeared with a local city CTO, and three others joined the First Lady of the United States on stage at an NGO conference in November 2018.

In these engagements, the teens represented themselves and their views, but they also represented the Microsoft Council for Digital Good.

Summit was only the beginning

When we envisioned the Council program, we thought the August Summit on campus was going to be the culmination of all of our activities and interactions with this impressive group of teens. In the end, it was just the beginning. We knew it would have been a missed opportunity not to bring the teens together again, so we extended the in-person program to include a second, more public event, in Washington, D.C., in July 2018.

An open letter

Building on their assignments to date, we tasked the youth with yet another work product: drafting an open letter to law and policymakers in the U.S. about working together to improve life online. (See, [this link](#).) This was a more challenging assignment for Council members, considering we provided only directional (as opposed to detailed, substantive) guidance. It became clear that 18 months on the Council had a positive impact on the individual members as they rose to meet the challenge. Like their previous assignments, we wanted this to uniquely be the work of the Council and

something that they could all be proud of.

Follow-on D.C. event

The open letter served as the centerpiece for a follow-on more public event held in Washington, D.C., on July 19, 2018. We compiled a half-day program, featuring the teens and all of their work from the past year and a half. The event, “Is there a place for civility in our digital future?” included two panel discussions:

- “Civility and our digital present: The state of online civility today,” and
- “Toward a culture of digital civility: The way forward”

Both panels featured Council members and three adult respondents. Whether as a panelist or part of the introductory or concluding segments, it was important that each Council member was given a speaking role and an assignment. After the teens presented their work on the panels (i.e., their individual activities in their communities on Safer Internet Day, the cohort Manifesto; the open letter, etc.), three adults from other technology companies, NGOs and/or international organizations shared their feedback and thoughts. All of the adults plus those in the audience were thoroughly impressed with the teens’ forethought, preparation and views. Following the event, we published two blogs: [one summarizing the event](#) and [the second](#), reflecting on the event overall.

After the two panels, the teens got a special surprise: each of them spent private time with the First Lady of the United States during which they presented to her their individual creative works about improving life online. The group then assembled for a sit-down with the First Lady, which included a discussion about the First Lady’s own related initiative BE BEST.

Capstone event

Immediately following the D.C. event and the visit with the First Lady, we held a brief capstone event at the hotel with the youth. There, we acknowledged their hard work and contributions throughout the Council program. We gave each of them a certificate and a crystal award to commemorate their time with us.

Since sunseting the pilot program

Six months after the D.C. event, which marked the official conclusion of this pilot program, we checked back in with the teens via email. It was also a few weeks before international Safer Internet Day 2019, so we were eager to see if they had anything planned (at their own initiative) in their schools or communities. In the email, we asked what they'd been up to since the D.C. event; if they'd done any writing on or talking about the subjects we'd discussed, or if there was anything they missed about the Council experience and program. Their heartfelt and heartwarming responses are captured in [this blog post](#).

In addition, following an internal version of a playbook similar to this one, Microsoft Egypt launched on Safer Internet Day 2019, an Arab Council for Digital Good and an African Council for Digital Good, which will each hold Summits in early 2019.

All of these efforts to reach out to and hear from young people bring dividends almost beyond measure. We encourage you to invest in a teen Council or other youth-focused initiative and savor the gratifying and rewarding experiences to come.

Contact Us

If you are interested in establishing a Council for Digital Good at your company or organization and have questions, feel free to contact us:

- Microsoft Digital Civility and Online Safety (msftosdc@microsoft.com)

