



Establishing a Torch Club

Getting Started

As with any BGCA program, Club youth development professionals make the greatest difference in a member's Torch Club experience. Having tween-friendly professionals oversee Torch Club is the first step to building a strong program and fostering a high level of commitment and engagement among tweens.

Identify Staff and Volunteers

Starting a Torch Club requires that a youth development professional or committed volunteer to be assigned as the Torch Club advisor. This position is critical because the strength of a Torch Club centers on the relationship between Torch Club members and their advisor.

There are two types of professionals who work with Torch Club members. Dedicated advisors are fully devoted to overseeing Torch Club, including regular meetings. They work with members as they plan and implement their projects or events. Shared/contributing youth development professionals spend part of their time with Torch Club members, providing additional support as needed. These could be either Club youth development professionals or volunteers.

When choosing a Club professional to act as a dedicated advisor or as a youth development professional, it's important to prioritize the qualifications you're seeking. Start with required qualifications, then move on to preferred qualifications. Through effective training, coaching, on-the-job experience and management, an individual who meets the minimum requirements may ultimately exceed the preferred qualifications. Identify individuals who understand tweens, can form a strong rapport with them, and who have a basic familiarity with adolescent interests and developmental stages by looking for the following:

Skills	Qualities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication• Interpersonal abilities• Team-building skills• Organization• Professionalism• Supervisory capability• Program planning• Community building/networking• Multi-tasking• Writing and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approachable/available• Honest/fair• Confident• Committed• Empathic• Open-minded• Caring/compassionate• Patient• Passionate about working with tweens• Friendly/fun

This list is not all-inclusive, but you can use it as a starting point to develop your own criteria for choosing youth development professionals to work with your Torch Club.

Recruit Torch Club Members

When recruiting members for the club, you may find the following strategies helpful.

Provide Meaningful Leadership Opportunities for All Youth

An essential role for advisors is offering leadership opportunities to youth on a regular (daily) basis – both informal opportunities such as helping clean up after a meeting and formal opportunities such as serving on an advisory board. This often happens on an individual basis, one club member at a time. While BGCA's leadership programs are valuable for providing structured leadership activities, youth benefit from informal, relevant and hands-on opportunities. Because young people have different learning styles, it is important to encourage them to develop and showcase their talents in a variety of ways.

It is also important to remember that youth are motivated to be involved in Torch Club for a variety of reasons. They want to please the advisor and be connected; they're seeking a sense of self-worth; they want to belong and be a valued member of the group; they would like to be seen as a leader; they want to have fun or explore a specific passion or interest; they hope to prepare for the future; or they have a genuine interest in community service or social justice. By tapping into members' motivations – particularly what they need to feel successful and connected to the group – advisors will be able to direct them to more meaningful leadership experiences. As members begin to see that others believe in them, they gain confidence and build self-esteem. This confidence empowers them to take on new roles and challenges.

The most meaningful leadership experience involves members working with others toward a shared goal. Torch Club projects are geared toward the common good of a school, the Club or the community. By focusing on the work rather than the youth, advisors show that they view the member as someone who can and should be serving and leading in this way. As they learn alongside adults, youth see their work as valuable and themselves as active participants.²¹ By encouraging youth to try out new or challenging roles, advisors help them identify and access their personal strengths in leading. When youth feel they have meaningful roles that allow them to exercise their influence, they feel more powerful and engaged.¹⁵

Identify Potential Members

All youth should have the opportunity to build their leadership skills. Any Club member can become a Torch Club member. The Torch Club advisor should seek the assistance of other youth development professionals members to help identify potential Torch Club members. Youth identified should be Club members between the ages of 10-13 and participate in a variety of Club programs and activities. Recruitment should be open to all and not limited to the most popular members in the Club. Advertise and recruit throughout the Club with posters and signs to reach out to all members who may be interested.

Once you've recruited members, take time to help each of them find their "best-fit" role in Torch Club.

Use a Personal, One-on-one Approach

Recruit members using a personal, one-on-one approach. Convey enthusiasm, personal involvement and commitment. Emphasize how prospective members can contribute to the program. If it is a new Torch Club, the recruiting responsibility will fall on the advisor and other youth development professionals. Ask Club members to identify prospective Torch Club members. Explain to potential Torch Club members how the program can help them personally by emphasizing the skills they can learn and the friendships they can develop. Cite examples of those who achieved personal and group goals through their involvement in Torch Clubs, including many Junior Youth of the Year and Youth of the Year, who credit their leadership abilities to participation in Torch Club.

Recruit a Large Enough Group

Recruit enough members to operate the program effectively. A minimum of six members is a chartering requirement. Establish meeting attendance requirements for continuing Torch Club membership and participation in special events. For example, prospective members must attend three consecutive meetings to qualify for membership.

Plan Your Torch Club Program

As a Torch Club advisor, your role is to guide members toward a shared goal as they create and plan service activities and events for the Club and the community. These experiences can either be ongoing projects or a one-day event. The content areas of Torch Club give members direction for planning a diverse, fun and interesting program of activities. The Torch Club National Project, which introduces a new theme every few years, is an important goal for members to work toward as they plan and implement their projects. For details on the planning process, see *Guiding Youth in Project Planning* on Page 19.

The following guidelines are characteristics of a high-performing Torch Club. Every club should build in these guidelines for program requirements, leadership activities and service responsibilities.

- A regular place and time for weekly Torch Club meetings.
- Torch Club members adhere to the Torch Club Members' Character Pledge. See Torch Club Members' Character Pledge on Page 5 in "Resources for Torch Club Members" under the Resources tab of this collection.
- Torch Club members create, organize and implement two or more service projects or civic engagement activities annually.
- Members also identify Year of Service projects to work with other Club service groups such as Keystone.
- Each Torch Club member serves as an active leader, providing three hours of service to the club monthly.

- Each Torch Club is chartered annually with at least 6-15 active members. Active participation is defined as attending 60 percent or more of Torch Club meetings, activities and service projects. Charters are active from Sept. 1-Aug. 31 and they are renewed annually.
- The National Torch Club Service Project Committee participates in all content areas and submits an entry for the Torch Club Award.
- Torch Club members receive recognition through the club's acknowledgment programs and President's Volunteer Service Awards. Community and civic award recognition opportunities should also be pursued.
- The Torch Club advisor markets media-worthy projects and activities through notices in local newspapers, radio/press announcements, social media and the Club website.
- Clubs maintain up-to-date files of their Torch Club charter and weekly meeting minutes, and a scrapbook of their club's publicity and activities.
- Torch Club members who are 13 years of age are mentored in their final year by Keystoners to become members who are of the Keystone Club if a Keystone Club exists.
- The Torch Club incorporates a Rites of Passage ceremony celebrated by the entire Club. The Rites of Passage ceremony not only marks the move from Torch to Keystone but also from elementary to middle school, or middle to high school as a way to reinforce academic achievement.

Host an Orientation

Host an orientation to kick off Torch Club. Even if your club is formed, an orientation is a time to review goals and commitments.

The orientation should be fun and interactive. Incorporate youth voice by including Torch Club members or other youth who champion service. It can be designed for Torch Club youth who have already committed or other youth who are interested. Consider the following topics:

- **Goal of the program** – Summarize the objective of the Torch Club, which is to develop in members the ability, confidence and motivation they need to lead meaningful change in themselves, with others and in their communities.
- **Overview of Torch Club** – Share with members what Torch Club is, and what they can do:
 - › Name the Torch Club.
 - › Charter the Torch Club with BGCA.
 - › Set a regular meeting day and time.
 - › Decorate the Torch Club “space.”
 - › Create and plan activities, events and service projects for the Club and the community.

- › Work with a team toward a shared goal.
- › Explore their passions and interests.
- › Discover personal leadership strengths.
- › Be a leader, a teammate, a spokesperson, an inventor, a creator, an artist, a helper or anything else they want to be in the Torch Club.
- › Plan a Torch Club calendar.
- › Connect with other Torch Club members around the world.
- **Torch Club projects** – Let youth know that they will identify needs in the Club or community and then design projects, experiences or events to address those needs. Introduce the Torch Club National Project and other award opportunities. See "Awards and Recognition" under the Resources tab in this collection.
- **Commitments for participation** – Be clear about the commitments for participation (e.g., time requirements, attendance, arriving on time, following through on tasks, putting in additional work as needed, etc.).
- **Opportunity to create meaningful change** – Help youth understand that their contributions matter and can make a big difference in the community. Make sure they see that this program is for all interested youth and that it is co-created by the youth who participate. The diversity of the group contributes to an exciting and engaging experience.

It's a great idea to engage Torch Club youth or other youth who are passionate about service to help you design and facilitate the orientation. Also consider inviting parents/caregivers to the orientation meeting. It's a great way to involve them and encourage support of their tweens.

Elect Officers

All members have the potential to be leaders. Your job as an advisor is to expose all members to the specific skills needed for various leadership roles, and the committee system that incorporates rotating offices allows you to nurture existing Torch Club members for future roles as officers.

Holding Elections

Explain that effective leaders or officers demonstrate dedication, follow-through and motivational skills to make sure that others get things done. Set certain requirements or abilities needed for each office to ensure you have strong officers. For example, you want someone with confidence and speaking ability for president, a "detail" person for secretary, etc. Post the responsibilities and requirements of the offices on a bulletin board for interested Torch Club members. The more officer positions you have, the more youth will be able to serve in leadership positions. Only four officers – president, vice president, secretary and treasurer – are required for chartering, but you may choose to add additional positions, such as an Event Coordinator for Torch Club events and projects. It is important to note that youth who can't attend regular meetings can still serve as volunteers to support events.

Each Torch Club designs its own election process, but here is one example of how it can work:

- Torch Club members consider the various positions and decide which one they are interested in. They communicate their interest to their peers. Members nominate their peers for various officer roles.
- Members are given advance notice of when nominations will be made, giving participants at least a week to think about the person they would like to nominate.
- When nominations are made, nominees have the chance to address the group, sharing the reasons they would like to be in the role for which they have been nominated and the leadership qualities they would bring to the job. All nominees have the option of not making a presentation before the group.
- Give members an opportunity to decline nominations for positions they're not interested in.
- Voting should be by secret ballot, with each Torch Club member writing the name of their preferred candidates on a ballot.
- The advisor counts the number of votes at a meeting in the presence of all members.
- The candidate receiving the highest number of votes for each office wins.
- Members must understand that election of officers is not a popularity contest, but a vote of confidence that a particular nominee is able to do an outstanding job as a group leader.

Officer Roles, Responsibilities and Resources

Overall responsibilities for all officers include organization and planning activities:

- Attend all meetings and be an active participant in Torch Club events.
- Lead Torch Club meetings.
- Give an officer report at each meeting.
- Report on the successes and disappointments (“highs” and “sighs”) of Torch Club events.
- Attend all Torch Club officer meetings (usually 30 minutes each week).
- Follow the Torch Club policies, procedures and rules created by each Torch Club.
- Respect others when they are talking.
- Be open to suggestions from others.
- Be organized and responsible.
- Be patient and work well with others.
- Take responsibility for your area to make sure everything runs smoothly.

- Take the lead role on one specific Torch Club project to be decided with the advisor at the first Torch Club officer meeting.
- Take notes at each meeting. The secretary combines all the notes into one page each week.

Responsibilities for President:

- Lead at all meetings and conduct them in an orderly manner.
- Develop ideas for making the Torch Club better.
- Act as the official representative to the BGCA National Torch Club program, signing off on all entries (e.g., awards, projects, etc.).
- Create an agenda for each meeting.
- Follow up on the work of officers and project committee chairpersons.
- Communicate regularly with the other officers and the Torch Club advisor.
- Set up separate Torch Club officer meetings to discuss events, money, community service projects, hosting a Torch Club Summit, etc.

Responsibilities for Vice President:

- Plan and run an icebreaker at the start of every meeting. Work with an advisor as a resource.
- Lead at meetings when the president is absent.
- Assist the president whenever you are called on.
- Work with the secretary to keep a binder of all Torch Club events. The binder should include notes about things to improve in the future.
- Work with the secretary to keep a binder of promotions, election speeches, alumni, etc.
- Be responsible for the physical set up of all meetings.
- Act as an alternate president for the BGCA National Torch Club program.

Responsibilities for Secretary:

- Keep minutes of all meetings neatly printed or typed in a loose-leaf notebook.
- Keep an up-to-date roster and record of attendance.
- Work with the vice president to keep a binder of all Torch Club events with notes about things to improve in the future.
- Work with the vice president to keep a binder of promotions, election speeches, alumni, etc.
- Update the president on service hours performed by Torch Club members.
- Respond to letters and other correspondence.

Responsibilities for Treasurer:

- Place Torch Club money in a separate account with the help of the club administration.
- Keep a written record of all the money received and used by the Torch Club.
- Meet with the Club administrator before each meeting to make sure Torch Club records match what the Club actually has in the Torch Club account.
- Report how much money the Torch Club has in the bank at each meeting with details about profits, losses and expenses incurred by the Torch Club.
- After the president and advisor have approved them, pay all authorized bills incurred by the Torch Club.

Be sure to let members run for the position they want so they'll be happy in the role. If a member wants to run for secretary, for example, but gets the most votes for president, they might perform poorly as president because their preference was for another role.

An optional position you may want to include in the elections is Events Coordinator:

- Take charge of all events and fundraisers.
- Work with the advisor to be responsible for designing the space, organizing the set-up, clean-up, promotion and other duties. All Torch Club members will create, dream, plan and implement the event, but the events coordinator takes responsibility for execution.
- Help decide which Torch Club members will be working in which areas (e.g., a carnival event will need a food person, someone in charge of face painting, someone to monitor the bean-bag toss or moon bounce).

Running A Torch Club Program

The most effective Torch Club programs enable members to form strong, positive relationships with the advisor and with their peers; and develop leadership skills and competencies through real-world, hands-on experiences. They incorporate the three content areas; have clearly defined goals and objectives; provide meaningful leadership opportunities for all youth; and create a fun and rewarding experience.

Plan the First Meeting

The success of the first meeting can often determine the success of the program. Although the advisor's primary role is to guide and support members in running the meetings, early meetings will require you to take the lead. The purpose of the first meeting is to help members:

- Find out who the other members are and get acquainted.
- Establish friendships.
- Find out who the advisor is.
- Recognize the advisor as an adult, friend, mentor and group guide.
- Have fun.

Elements of the First Meeting

Since the first meeting is particularly important, it should be conducted in a quiet, comfortable room. Help members feel that it is their room. If chairs are used, ask members to arrange them so everyone can see each other. Monitor their actions and assist only when needed. Meetings can last anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour, whatever you feel is right for your club. The meeting should be well planned and focused on no more than five agenda items. Here's an example of how a first meeting might proceed. See also Sample Torch Club Meeting Agenda on Page 4 in "Resources for Torch Club Members" under the Resources tab of this collection.

- **Introductions/Icebreaker** – Instead of standard introductions, start with an icebreaker that uses members' names to get members to loosen up. Visit the [Staff Practices](#) page of Club Programs and choose a Community Builder.
- **Torch Club expectations** – Discuss the positive role Torch Club members can play in the club and community and the individual commitment that is critical to the club's success. Give members time to ask questions. Let members know about expectations of group members, their roles and responsibilities. Be careful not to inundate them with more information than they can absorb. Too much information at the first meeting can be a turnoff, whereas a fun and enjoyable time can guarantee perfect attendance at subsequent meetings.
- **Brainstorming activities** – Invite all members to brainstorm the kinds of fun activities that could take place at the club or in the community.
- **Naming the Torch Club** – Ask group members to suggest names for the Torch Club. Use a secret ballot so members can vote, tally the responses, and announce the winning name.
- **Decide on a meeting time and space** – At the first meeting, Torch Club members can decide on a regular day and time they would like to meet. They also can discuss how they would like to decorate the Torch Club space.

- **Torch Club Members' Character Pledge** – Present the Torch Club Members' Character Pledge to the group and invite youth to commit to the club by taking the pledge. The code provides a set of positive statements to guide members' behavior in their daily lives.
 - › I will lead by example and be a positive role model for others.
 - › I will be responsible for what I say and do to others.
 - › I will display good sportsmanship and play by the rules.
 - › I will respect the Club, youth development professionals and fellow members.
 - › I will strive to do my very best at all times.

See Torch Club Members' Character Pledge on Page 5 in "Resources for Torch Club Members" under the Resources tab of this collection.

- **Reflection** – Torch Club members reflect on the first meeting by asking what happened, how they felt about the experience, how it relates to their expectations, and what they would like to do differently in future meetings.

If time allows, the remainder of the first meeting might be spent building the team through fun activities that encourage group interactions. These activities can help members develop interpersonal skills critical to their success as a group.

Charter Your Torch Club

When Torch Club members fully understand the purpose and objectives of the program, elect officers and decided on a name, the club is ready to apply for a National Charter from BGCA. Chartering your Torch Club connects you with other Torch Clubs throughout the Movement. It also gives you the opportunity to connect to the BGCA National Torch Club Advisor.

No chartering fee is required, but advisors need to complete the charter application form on the online community, Torch Club Corner at [BGCA.net/TorchClubCommunity](https://www.bgca.net/TorchClubCommunity).

Ask Torch Club members to assist in completing the charter application by printing out a blank form and reading the "what projects will we do" sections to the group. Invite them to give you information for these areas. You will then complete the charter online and submit it to BGCA. A Torch Club may have no more than 15 members. If you have more than 15 members who want to participate, your club may form and charter additional Torch Clubs. All charters expire on Aug. 31, and Torch Clubs are required to renew charters annually. Torch Clubs can charter throughout the year. It is never too late to charter your Torch Club.

Common Questions and Concerns for Members

- I can't do this. I don't want to be embarrassed.
- Who am I in this group? What is my place in the group?
- Who are the others? Who do I like?
- Who likes me? Will I be accepted?
- What is my role?
- What tasks will I have and are they important?
- Will I be capable?
- Will I have influence over others in the group?
- Who is the leader?
- Will he or she value me?
- Is the leader competent?

Manage Group Dynamics

Getting the group to work as a team takes time and patience. Group development is not a predictable process, it is a continual process of surmounting obstacles to help individuals coalesce into a group. Torch Club Advisors should support group building as a facilitator by keeping the following in mind:

- Form chairs in a circle so that members can look to see each other's faces and build a sense of community.
- Each person will have their unique perspective. It is important that everyone is heard and celebrated for their individual contributions to the conversation.
- Allow each person to speak without interruption. Everyone should practice active listening – that is to wait until the speaker has finished sharing what they have to say before they respond.
- Consider starting each meeting with a community builder, a three- to five-minute activity intended to engage the group. This creates an environment for learning and exploration. To find Community Builders to lead your sessions, visit the [Staff Practices](#) page of Club Programs.

Establishing the Group

As the group begins to form, Torch Club members will seek to find out about one another and uncover attitudes, likes and dislikes. This discovery process continues until each member makes a decision concerning his or her position in the group. During this stage, members determine their level of initial involvement. Some members will be eager, looking forward to opportunities for excitement, achievement and challenges, while others will be unsure about participating in a group. Sorting out how they want to work together will provide valuable experience in teamwork, negotiation and collaboration for members.

Advisors can help members grow by giving them honest feedback about their behavior in the group, by helping them see their strengths as well as the areas that need improvement.

Members' Concerns and Questions

The inner workings of a group are complex. Knowing what to look for when the group formation process takes place can make a big difference in establishing a positive, productive group. When forming a Torch Club, it is important to understand the questions and concerns members may have. Through observation, listening and talking with the group, you identify potential concerns or questions, and work with individual members to resolve them successfully.

Advisors can use the Ask-Listen-Encourage approach. See Page 5 in "Your Role as a Torch Club Advisor" under the Resources tab of this collection for more information to help members work through these concerns. Teaching members to talk openly about their concerns helps create an

atmosphere where members, with one another's support, can disagree with the advisor and express different points of view.

Group Agreements/Guidelines

To encourage positive group interactions and help members develop meaningful relationships based on mutual respect, advisors can use these questions:

- **How do we want to feel during the time together?** Ask members to identify how they presently feel when they are in the group and how they want to feel. By creating a list of group members' desired feelings, advisors help them get specific about the climate they want to create.
- **What will we do in order to feel this way?** Ask group members to brainstorm ideas for positive behaviors to help them feel the way they want to while in Torch Club.
- **What will we do when there is a conflict?** Ask members to reflect on what helps them feel better when there is a conflict or they are not feeling the way they want to feel. Then ask them to brainstorm specific behaviors that help with conflict resolution.

Through these questions and reflections, group members can build agreements about how they want to work together as a group. For more detailed instructions, see "Session 1: Building Your Group Agreements."

Brainstorming and Decision-making

Success involves group brainstorming and shared decision-making. When planning service projects and fun activities, the brainstorming process is often used to **generate ideas or to define options**. It can be an easy and non-threatening way for all members to participate. Suggest to members that they use a brainstorming session that includes the following important steps:

1. Clarify rules: hear one idea at a time; allow no criticism or discussion of ideas; record all ideas even if repetitious; piggyback on others' ideas.
2. Initially hear ideas from each member of the group in sequence.
3. Record all ideas; do not discuss them.
4. Define the topic; add relevant information as needed.
5. Review all ideas, combining ideas that are similar or redundant.
6. Review, clarify and accept additions to develop a final list of ideas.
7. Conclude with final input from members.

Engagement Check

To make sure that the Torch Club program is meeting the interests and needs of members, it's a good idea to evaluate the effectiveness and progress of the group. This is not a requirement, but many advisors do

it in preparation for a mid-year re-election process. Here are some basic suggestions for evaluation:

- **Develop mechanisms for the evaluation** – An informal evaluation process helps members appreciate each other’s contributions toward the group’s goals. Components could include a questionnaire, a group discussion, a suggestion box or any other mechanism to gather feedback on the success of the group.
- **Pay attention to attendance patterns** – Attendance is a good indicator of whether the planned program meets the interests and needs of members.
- **Conduct a mid-year assessment** – The month of January is a good time to evaluate the Torch Club’s activities over the last four months. Some topics to consider in the assessment are:
 - › What worked well?
 - › What leadership skills did members gain?
 - › What opportunities did members have to develop public speaking skills?
 - › How many Club or community service projects were conducted?
 - › What were the different ways members demonstrated leadership?

After conducting an assessment of the fall/winter program, incorporate the suggestions of the group. Recognize their ideas and schedule events for the spring months. Review efforts of previous months and poll members on summer activities they would like to do. Torch Club members may want to meet less frequently and perform Junior Staff responsibilities during the summer.

Engage Family and Community Members

Gaining the support of parents/caregivers, school representatives and community members will strengthen your Torch Club program and give members access to valuable networks.

Family Involvement

Involve parents/caregivers as much as possible by keeping them informed of their tween’s progress and asking them to reinforce learning at home. Begin with these basic approaches:

- Schedule an information meeting with parents/caregivers to let them know about the Torch Club program. If possible, schedule these after work or during lunch. You may also want to invite them to an orientation with youth participants.
- Create a flyer describing the importance of leadership and highlight activities and recognition ceremonies involving family members. Be sure to communicate dates and times when parents are required to attend an event to ensure greater involvement.

- Encourage Club/Youth Center members to discuss what they are discovering about leadership abilities with parents/caregivers.
- Maintain contact with parents/caregivers on a regular basis through texts, emails or a parent newsletter throughout the implementation of the Torch Club program.
- Invite family members to visit and observe the program in progress. Although parent/caregiver involvement is an essential element to help Club members thrive, not all parents will have the time or capacity to be involved. Be sure to provide additional encouragement for youth whose families are not able to be present.
- Work to involve family members as partners in your Club's effort.
 - › You may also want to create a dedicated bulletin board that illustrates behaviors that parents/caregivers can exhibit to help their children develop strong, positive leadership skills and behaviors.
 - › Hold monthly meetings and quarterly family events to keep parents aware of what is going on in the Club. Distribute newsletters or "What's happening now?" updates so parents can discuss opportunities with their children.

Responsibility Pledge for Parents, Caregivers and Guardians

- I will lead by example and be a positive role model for my children and other youth.
- I will be responsible for what I say and do to my children and others.
- I will treat my children and others with kindness, honesty and respect.
- I will respect the Club, youth development professionals and members.
- I will teach my children to be sensitive and tolerant of others.

Responsibility Pledge for Parents, Caregivers and Guardians

The use of a responsibility pledge is another way to get parents/caregivers involved and reinforce their role in the development of leadership in their children/adolescents.

Some Clubs place the members' and parents' pledges side by side on one bulletin board to communicate the Club's commitment to leadership development and the vital role that parents play in helping their children become leaders and people of good character.

School and Community Support

When implementing a Torch Club program, meet with school officials to examine their efforts. Many schools are implementing successful leadership and service programs, and you may be able to benefit from initiatives already in place. Ask to review leadership tools and resources and determine what is working well and what is not working. Establish ongoing channels of communication with the school to make sure your efforts are consistent with theirs.

One important concept as youth development professionals and youth embark on the Torch Club experience is the concept of partnering with communities. Volunteering and providing service to others is by nature a good deed. The intention is to help and contribute in a meaningful way. Recognize that as the group identifies a community need and explores it more deeply, there are opportunities to engage with the communities affected by the need. People representing these communities have first-

Check out Session 3: What Does Our Community Need? (of the Teens Take the Lead: A Guide to Service-Learning) for an activity youth can engage in to best understand their community.

hand experiences and knowledge about what their needs are, as well as how they should be addressed. This information is critical and helps inform the project. In this way, the relationship with affected communities should be viewed as an equal partnership with each partner having something valuable to teach. Taking time to understand the community need and building relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect is a key element of the Torch Club experience, so it's important to understand the significance of partnering with communities during this process.

Connect to Other BGCA Resources

BGCA offers a wealth of programs to complement the Torch Club experience. These offerings are just a few of the excellent vehicles for enhancing the character and leadership skills developed through Torch Club activities.

Keystone Clubs

Keystone is the Boys & Girls Club Movement's ultimate program for youth ages 14-18. It's the teen counterpart to Torch Club. This unique program provides leadership development opportunities for youth to participate in activities, both in and out of the Club, in three focus areas: academic success, career preparation and community service. With the guidance of an adult advisor, Keystone Clubs aim to positively impact teens, their Club and local communities.

Torch Club participation is excellent preparation for Keystone. Take advantage of that by linking your Torch Club members with Keystoners who can act as excellent role models and provide additional "near-peer" support. Ask for interested Torch Club members to be included in quarterly Keystone meetings or have Torch Club members participate in Keystone service projects. Looking forward to moving up to Keystone in the future can be an important incentive to remain engaged with the Boys & Girls Club. Some Torch Clubs present certificates to members as they "graduate" to Keystone.

Teens Take the Lead

This program follows a project-based or service-learning approach to support youth implementing service-learning projects. In partnership with Club youth development professionals, youth engage in a three-step process to discover personal and collective **passions**, identify and address a community **problem**, and develop a **project** to activate participation from the community.

The program's structure is intentionally designed with sessions that help youth think about, plan, implement and reflect upon their service-learning project. The program takes teens through the process of a sustained service-learning project, step by step and is an excellent resource for Torch Club members as they implement their projects.

Positive Club Climate Teen Project Guide

The Positive Club Climate Teen Project Guide takes teens through a self-led, continuous quality improvement cycle, with the goal of making positive change in their respective Clubs. The guide focuses on social-emotional development and wellbeing to support teens in leading a project that will improve their daily Club experiences.

Youth of the Year Leadership Suite

Youth of the Year is BGCA's signature effort to foster a new generation of leaders, fully prepared to live and lead in a diverse, global and integrated world economy. In the 21st-century world and workplace, leadership skills such as communication, goal-setting and teamwork are essential for everyone – especially young people preparing to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. With a grassroots beginning in 1947, Youth of the Year has evolved into a comprehensive leadership development suite, which includes:

- Youth of the Month – Leadership Recognition Program
- Junior Youth of the Year – Leadership Readiness Program
- Youth of the Year – Leadership Development Program

Service Recipe Guides

Service Recipe Guides get youth engaged in their communities through fun projects. Studies show that young people who engage in service do better in school, maintain positive relationships with adults and avoid risky behaviors. These students are also less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to graduate than their peers who do not serve. Service Recipe Guides encourage Club youth to participate in volunteer and service projects that help them become successful and productive citizens.

CareerLaunch

CareerLaunch introduces young people between the ages of 13-15 to a wide range of career opportunities. Through engaging, interactive sessions and activities, Club members become familiar with the working world, and begin to prepare for employment by exploring career options and the education and training required for each. CareerLaunch allows participants to:

- Define the role and impact of technology on the world of work, in business and industry and in everyday life.
- Examine trends in career opportunities for the future.
- Consider traditional and nontraditional career fields.
- Identify how different school subjects and activities directly affect success later in life.
- Participate in field trips to colleges, trade schools and places of business.

Junior Staff

Service to Club and community is one of the four areas of emphasis for the Torch Club program. Junior Staff can enhance your program's strength in this area as it:

- Provides opportunities for members to actively participate in a comprehensive career development program that integrates leadership, character and service.
- Offers youth an essential guidance and support system, helping them examine the values inherent in human service.
- Encourages youth to actively pursue a career in the Boys & Girls Club Movement.

Torch Club members are a vital part of Club operations. Members assist in all areas of Club programming as gamesroom assistants, arts and crafts assistants, new-member tour guides, food program aides, computer lab helpers, check-in counter helpers, gym assistants, library assistants and special event aides. Junior Staff can help Torch Club members see the work they do in the Club as useful preparation for the working world. At the same time it can help them formulate career choices by allowing them to explore different vocations.

Network With Other Clubs

By networking with other Clubs, you can share resources, ideas and plans to enhance your own Torch Club members' experiences.

Torch Club Corner

Torch Club advisors can visit Torch Club Corner at [BGCA.net/TorchClubCommunity](https://www.bgca.net/TorchClubCommunity) to charter their Torch Clubs, post photos, participate in group discussions, receive program updates, documents and many other resources to help them plan an exciting program for members. On the Corner are many documents, tried and true, posted by Torch Club advisors. Access these resources on the Torch Club Corner:

1. [BGCA.net/TorchClubCommunity](https://www.bgca.net/TorchClubCommunity).

Torch Club Summit

Torch Club Summits are one-day events that celebrate leadership, character, service and fellowship between Torch Clubs. Summits are organized by local Torch Clubs, usually on a state- or region-wide basis. Check the Torch Club Corner on [BGCA.net](https://www.bgca.net) to see whether your state or region has a Summit, or to organize and promote a Summit of your own.

For more information, see Torch Club Summit on Page 7 in "Awards and Recognition" under the Resources tab of this collection.

Guiding Youth in Project Planning

Guidelines for Torch Club Projects

Every project or event should have a purpose that reflects and embodies the objectives of the Torch Club program. These projects or events should enable Club members to:

- Develop a sense of usefulness by doing something of value for others.
- Build leadership skills.
- Learn individual and group skills necessary for living a responsible and fulfilled life.
- Have opportunities to plan their own programs and make decisions.
- Be of service to the Club, the community or the world.
- Form friendships and enjoy camaraderie.
- Gain recognition for achievements.
- Have a sense of appreciation for, and loyalty to other Torch Club members.
- Develop interaction with an interested and respected adult advisor.
- Become ready for membership in a Keystone Club.

As Torch Club members plan, design and implement their projects, the advisor guides them through the process to make sure their projects meet the desired objectives and to help them learn the steps involved in service learning.

Torch Club members may plan and implement several projects, but advisors should make sure they are aware of the Torch Club National Project theme each year and plan their activities and events with that in mind. See Torch Club National Project on Page 2 in "Awards and Recognition" under the Resources tab of this collection for detailed guidelines on planning for the National Project.

Problem + Passion = Project

Torch Club advisors should use BGCA's innovative new program guide, *Teens Take the Lead: A Guide to Service Learning* to engage youth in designing and implementing their projects. The guide takes youth step-by-step through the process of a sustained service-learning project, using a project-based or service-learning approach.

Step 1: Passion

In this step, Torch Club members discover interests, strengths and what matters most to them. Passion is the basis of all leadership development. The advisor's role involves cultivating youths' passions, helping them discover interests, strengths and what matters most to them. Passion connects youth to their visions and hopes for the future. It helps them stay engaged when challenges emerge. Advisors can find out what drives youth by asking the following questions:

- What is your passion?
- What is something that makes you happy?
- What are you good at doing?

Step 2: Problem

In this step, Torch Club youth explore the specific community need they want to address in their service project. As the group explores this problem or need, remember to highlight positive qualities that make the community resilient. Consider a community need that no one is addressing by asking youth the following questions:

- What does the community need?
- Does the need already exist, or will it arise in the future?
- Do any of your friends have the same thoughts?

Step 3: Project

In this step, Torch Club members design the project, select a committee, develop a plan for action, and prepare for and lead the project. Once the project is complete, they prepare for and lead a final presentation for the Club, other youth, their families and the community to showcase the highlights of what they learned.

Communities face challenges, but these challenges create opportunities for people to come together and collaborate on strategies to improve lives. Find out how youth will tackle the project by asking them the following questions:

- What will you do?
- How can you create a team of people who care?
- How can you engage your friends to take action?

Teens Take the Lead: A Guide to Service Learning

The guide details nine interactive 45-60 minute sessions and three 45-60 minute work-group sessions using a collaborative leadership structure with youth and youth development professionals. It also contains all the necessary checklists, tip sheets, worksheets and form filling templates in the guide with each session.

- Session 1: Team Leadership
- Session 2: What is Your Passion?
- Session 3: What Does Our Community Need?
 - › Group Work Session 1: Research
- Session 4: A Closer Look at Our Community Need
- Session 5: Conduct Additional Research
- Session 6: Design the Service-learning Project
- Session 7: Plan for Action
 - › Group Work Session 2: Committee Work
- Session 8: Get Ready for the Service-learning Project

- Session 9: Do the Project!
 - › Group Work Session 3: Prepare for Presentation & Celebration
- Session 10: Presentation & Celebration
- Additional Resources
 - › Promoting Member Participation
 - › Recruitment Strategy Template
 - › Tips for Recruiting Other Members
 - › Marketing and Promoting Your Project
 - › Using Social Media to Promote Your Project
 - › Online Resources

When using the guide to help Torch Club youth plan and implement their service project, it's a good idea to dedicate a regularly scheduled Torch Club meeting to run each session. Depending on Torch Club members' interests, needs and availability, you can determine the frequency of the service-learning sessions and group work sessions (e.g., monthly, bi-weekly, weekly). Collectively decide what will work best.

Scheduling a Torch Club Project

A best practice is to allow approximately six months from start to finish to run an effective service-learning project. When developing a project plan, consider school events, holidays and breaks, summer programming and events in youth and Club staff lives.

It is best to plan Torch Club activities for an entire year at one time. Officers, members and advisors will want to put the plan in writing, with activities listed in order by the date that each will be done. Suggest that the Torch Club secretary take notes, maybe using flip-chart paper to record ideas, or encourage individual Torch Club members to jot down their ideas on paper.

Integrate Torch Club Leadership and Service Sessions

Torch Club Leadership and Service Sessions are designed to support and enhance your Torch Club program. They give members practice and experience in basic leadership competencies and provide them with opportunities to try on different leadership roles while working as part of a team.

Using the Sessions

The 12 sequenced Torch Club Leadership and Service Sessions give youth the chance to explore self-leadership, leadership with others, and leadership in the community. The sessions offer practice and support members' readiness for participating in Torch Club. Depending on your Torch Club's needs, sessions can be used for several different purposes.

Build Readiness

The sessions can be used with all Club tweens before establishing a Torch Club. The sessions build readiness for participation in Torch Club. If choosing this option, it's best to use the 12 sessions in sequence on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule.

Strengthen Leadership Skills

Sessions can be implemented with Torch Club members during the course of the Torch Club charter year to strengthen leadership skills and provide leadership experience. If you are using the sessions for this purpose, you can incorporate them into existing Torch Club meetings. Each session takes approximately 50 minutes. One way to schedule them is to dedicate every other meeting to a session. As members progress through the sessions – particularly Sessions 8 and 9 – where they identify needs in the community, set a goal and determine action steps, they can consider what they learn and apply it to the Torch Club National Project.

Support the Team Process

Sessions can be used with Torch Club members any time as stand-alone activities to support the small-group/team process. If you are using them in this way, skip “Session 1: Building Your Group Agreements” and the “Group Collaborative Review” at the start of each session. For this purpose, you can choose sessions that meet the specific needs of group members.

Leadership Competencies

The 12 Leadership and Service sessions develop members' competencies in the three domains of leadership: self-leadership, leadership with others and leadership in the community. The following chart shows which sessions address which competencies.

	Self-leadership	Leadership with Others	Leadership in the Community
SESSION 1: Building Your Group Agreements	✓	✓	
SESSION 2: Leadership I.D. Cards	✓	✓	
SESSION 3: It's a Match	✓	✓	
SESSION 4: Up and At 'Em!	✓	✓	✓
SESSION 5: Accept and Respect	✓	✓	✓
SESSION 6: In Your Shoes	✓	✓	
SESSION 7: Where Do You Stand	✓	✓	✓
SESSION 8: Making a Move(ment)	✓	✓	✓
SESSION 9: Stepping Up		✓	✓
SESSION 10: The Fitting Room	✓	✓	
SESSION 11: Good Graffiti	✓	✓	✓
SESSION 12: Wanted Posters	✓	✓	