



2026 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) Frequently Asked Questions

**July 14-18, 2026
University of Missouri Campus
Columbia, MO**

What is MO-YLF?

The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) is a five-day overnight program that empowers high school students with disabilities. It brings together approximately 30 students from across Missouri to develop leadership skills and career awareness. Through interactive sessions, delegates gain a deeper understanding of their disabilities and those of their peers, while analyzing strengths and weaknesses to become self-determined individuals. MO-YLF also equips students with knowledge of the legislative process and disability laws, empowering them to advocate for themselves and others. With visits to the state Capitol and a mock legislative session, delegates learn firsthand how laws are made. The program fosters self-advocacy skills and promotes disability awareness, connecting students with community resources for independent living. Fun group activities facilitate networking and the formation of lifelong friendships. MO-YLF ultimately leaves students with renewed confidence and a clearer vision for their post-secondary goals in education, employment, and independent living. The Forum is a life-changing experience that combines leadership training with self-discovery to change the future for aspiring young leaders with disabilities.

What does it cost to attend the Forum?

There is no cost for students who are selected to attend. All costs including lodging, meals, and accommodations are covered by the program. The Forum is funded through state agencies, sponsorships, and donations. Students and their families are responsible for their transportation to and from Columbia.

Who is Eligible to Apply?

- Missouri students aged 16-21 who are currently enrolled in a high school education program (public, private, virtual, GED, homeschool) are invited to apply.

- **OR** plan to graduate in December 2025 or May 2026
- Each student must have a diagnosed disability at the time of application. We welcome applications from individuals with ANY type of disability.
- Applicants should be able to demonstrate their leadership potential through participation in school, extracurricular activities, and/or community involvement.
- Applicants must have the ability to interact with other students, adapt to new surroundings, follow an intense schedule of daily activities, and demonstrate a willingness to participate in small and large group discussions.

How Do I Apply?

Visit the [Missouri Youth Leadership Forum](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf) website at <https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf> to learn more about the MO-YLF and access the application.

Application Deadline

The deadline date to submit your application is March 16, 2026.

Have questions? Contact Us

Contact the Governor's Council on Disability at (800) 877-8249 (voice) or email us at gcd@oa.mo.gov

Who coordinates YLF?

The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum is hosted by the Governor's Council on Disability in collaboration with MOCIL, MU-Pre-Employment Transition Services, Paraquad, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Where do the students sleep while at YLF?

During YLF, delegates will sleep in the dorms on the Mizzou campus. They will be housed in a double occupancy room and have a roommate. There is an overnight dorm parent present on each floor to supervise hallways and assist with any possible needs overnight.

What happens if the student needs medical attention or takes daily medication?

There is 24-hour nursing care available. The nursing staff is on-site at the dorm overnight, and with the group during all day-time activities.

What is a Personal Care Attendant (PCA)? Can I attend YLF with my student as a PCA?

A **Personal Care Attendant** would be there to provide help for participants who need help showering, dressing, feeding themselves, and getting ready for the day in the morning, and ready for bed at night. One of the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum's goals is to foster the independence of our participants, which is why we don't allow for parents/family members to serve as PCAs. For so many of the youth participants, MO-YLF is their first time away from home and their parents. YLF is an opportunity for them to experience this independence in a safe environment. We feel it's important for them to have that opportunity. It's also much easier for them to open up and build connections with their peers if there isn't a familiar face.

What does a typical day look like at YLF?

The day generally starts with breakfast at 8:00 a.m. in the college cafeteria. Large group presentations, hands-on activities, educational games, and small group activities fill the day hours. Every evening a special event, such as a keynote speaker, adaptive sports, talent show, and a dance/social is planned. The day ends with some free time, with delegates in their dorm rooms and lights out at 10:30 p.m.

Is YLF a safe place?

YLF delegates are never alone. Delegates are divided into small group teams. Each team has three to four leaders present to supervise and assist with whatever additional needs the delegate may have. Delegates go to and from all activities in groups. There is also an overnight dorm parent present on each floor to supervise hallways and assist with any possible needs overnight.

How are students selected?

1. All applications are initially reviewed for eligibility requirements.
2. All eligible applicants will be contacted by phone during the first part of April for a short, get-to-know-you conversation with a member of the MO-YLF Planning Committee. This is our opportunity to learn more about you, hear your excitement for YLF, and make sure the Forum is a great fit for you. If we are unable to reach you, we may attempt to call your school to schedule an appropriate time. **It is very important to make sure you provide the most up-to-date contact information and to follow up with us as soon as you are able if you miss a phone call from our team.**
3. After all conversations are completed, the Planning Committee members will meet to discuss applicants and make their final delegate selections.
4. All applicants will receive a letter in the mail by the end of April to notify them whether they were accepted, placed on the waiting list, or not accepted.

5. Up to thirty delegates (applicants) will be selected to attend. Alternate delegates are applicants who are placed on a waiting list to attend the MO- YLF if a selected delegate is no longer able to attend.

If selected to attend the YLF, what happens next?

- If selected or placed on the waiting list, you will receive additional forms with your letter that will need to be completed and returned. These forms will help provide additional information, including details about what reasonable accommodations are needed. They also help us to make sure we can provide all participants with the best possible experience during MO-YLF.
- You will also be asked to provide a headshot photo of yourself, which will be used for your name tag and our participant roster that staff members are provided with.
- Your packet will also include more detailed information about the forum's schedule and activities.
- Parents/guardians will also be contacted by a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor to complete a required authorization form for participation. This form is separate from those that you will receive in your acceptance/waitlist packet.

What does it mean to be on the waitlist (alternates)?

- If a spot opens for you to participate in MO-YLF, you and your parents/guardians will be informed by email. We will also follow up by phone if we don't get confirmation that you've received our email. This is when you will receive additional detailed information about the Forums schedule and activities.
- We often get asked why those who have been placed on the waitlist need to complete the forms, sign the VR authorization form, and submit a photo. The reasoning behind this is that our team wants to make sure we have everything in place for you to attend if the possibility arises, even if it's a week before MO-YLF!