

**Engaging Youth in Partnership: A Resource Document for Youth Serving  
Agencies and Programs**

**Prepared by the National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health  
Youth Engagement Work Group  
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## 1. Engaging Youth: Reasons and Benefits

### ***Introduction***

Fundamental to working with or on behalf of youth is the engagement of youth in collective decision making and action (Eccles&Gootman, 2002). *“The essence of youth involvement is a partnership between adults and young people - one in which each party has the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions and in which the contribution of each is recognized and valued”* (Advocates for Youth <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/workingwithyouth/910?task=view> ).

Engaging youth and families has significant positive impact for both the youth and for the organization. Actively working with youth in partnership builds on young people’s capabilities, assists them to cultivate their own talents, increases their feelings of self-worth, and eases their transition into adulthood (Klindera&Pagliaro, 1999).

The benefits of engaging youth in health issues and programming are well documented. When seeking to engage in efforts to create systems changes which positively impact health outcomes for youth, the nation’s movement to control tobacco provides successful examples on how efforts can be mobilized to influence policy changes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control (2010) strongly recommend engaging with youth to advocate for adolescent health issues. Youth engagement is found to be an effective strategy across health issues. California Advocacy for Comprehensive Family Life Education found that the full integration of well-trained youth was important in influencing policy change. The study also demonstrated that adults played an integral role in working with youth (Brindis, Geierstanger, &Faxio, 2009).

In addition to positive outcomes when adults engage with youth as advocates, engaging youth in all aspects of youth programming has significant positive impact. Health services and public policies designed to assist young people in their goals of healthy living are more meaningful and effective when young people have leadership responsibilities in every aspect of program planning and implementation (Bourdon et al., 1998).

### ***Quick Tips***

#### **Benefits for the Organization**

*Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming.* Advocates for Youth.

- Fresh ideas, unshackled by *the way things have always been done*
- New perspectives on decision making, including more relevant information about young people's needs and interests
- Candid responses about existing services
- Additional data for analysis and planning that may be available only to youth
- More effective outreach that provides important information from peer to peer
- Additional human resources as youth and adults share responsibility

- Greater acceptance of messages, services, and decisions because youth were involved in shaping them
- Increased synergy from partnering youth's energy and enthusiasm with adults' professional skills and experience
- Enhanced credibility of the organization to both youth and advocates.

In a published study on the impacts of youth on adults and organizations, the Innovation Center found the following positive effects on the organization when youth are engaged (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000):

- Youth involvement becomes the organizational expectation
- Young people clarify the organizational mission
- Organizations become more connected and responsive to youth in the community
- Organizations place greater value on inclusivity and representation
- Organizations are more appealing to potential funders
- Organizations reach out to the community (community advocacy, policy-making and service)

### **Benefits for Young People**

*Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming.* Advocates for Youth.

- Increased status and stature in the community
- Improved competencies and increased self-esteem
- Stronger skills and experience as leaders
- Greater knowledge and understanding of other cultures
- Increased self-discipline and schedule management
- Greater appreciation of the multiple roles of adults
- Broader career choices

### **WebLinks**

#### **Advocates for Youth**

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/workingwithyouth/910?task=view>

Offers a wide variety of resources on youth engagement and youth-adult partnership.

#### **Act for Youth**

[http://www.actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/engagement/](http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement/)

This brief article, "What is Youth Engagement, Really," defines what is meant by youth engagement, describes why it is important, and outlines the benefits.

#### **Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development**

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth\\_in\\_Decision\\_Making-At\\_The\\_Table-Report.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth_in_Decision_Making-At_The_Table-Report.pdf)

This research report involving 19 youth and 29 adults from 15 organizations highlights the impact of youth on adults and organizations.

## 2. Best Practices for Youth Engagement and Youth-Adult Partnerships

### *Introduction*

This section will consider best practices and strategies that have been shown in the literature and in the field to be effective. According to the Innovation Center (2003), there are three different attitudes that adults can hold towards young people:

- **Youth as Objects:** “Adults know what is best for youth and control situations in which they are allowed to be involved.”
- **Youth as Recipients:** “Adults allow youth to be involved in decision making because they think the experience will be good for them.”
- **Youth as Partners:** “Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer, and youth are encouraged to become involved.”

The attitude that leads to the best outcomes is when youth are involved as partners. It is important to maintain good policies and practices in youth-adult partnerships to promote collaboration and effective programs. The aim of this section is to consider effective strategies to move forward youth engagement and partnership. In particular, the section will consider strategies that may be possible for youth serving agencies and programs, including organizations with an interest in advancing youth health, safety, and wellness, such as within the National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health.

### *Effective youth-adult partnership strategies:*

- **Establish clear goals for the partnership:** The youth and the adults must understand what their roles and responsibilities will be in achieving the goals.
- **Share the power to make decisions:** If youth have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of *partnership*.
- **Get the highest levels of the organization to commit fully** to youth’s participation in the organization’s work.
- **Ensure that each adult and young person enters the partnership with a clear understanding** of everyone’s roles and responsibilities. Not all adults will want to work with youth and not all youth will want to work with adults in a partnership capacity.

When involving youth, it is important to make sure that their involvement is truly active, and not confined to a token role. It is important to listen to their thoughts, validate their thinking, and encourage their ideas.

### *Quick Tips (Advocates for Youth, 2001)*

- **Hours for meetings and work:** To engage youth, program planners must find nontraditional times at which to hold important meetings and may need to compromise. For adults, this may mean holding meetings in the late afternoon or evening or on weekends. For youth, this may mean using the school community service hours to attend daytime meetings.
- **Transportation:** Program planners should schedule meetings in easily accessible locations and should provide travel vouchers or promptly reimburse youth for transportation costs.

- **Food:** When meetings occur at meal times, organizations should provide young people either with food or with sufficient funds to pay for meals.
- **Agency staff and policies:** In agencies that have always operated from an exclusively adult perspective, staff usually needs cultural competency training prior to involving youth meaningfully. Staff must accept young people's perspectives and ideas and be willing to change rules to meet the needs of youth. With input from both youth and adults, organizations should develop policies on youth/adult interactions.
- **Expectations:** Establish high expectations for everyone involved. Don't patronize youth by lowering expectations regarding them. On the other hand, don't expect more from young people than from adults. \*Don't make assumptions about what individuals—of any age—are like.

***Important Elements Shared by Successful Youth Involvement Programs (Advocates for Youth, 2001):***

- Young people make significant decisions. They identify issues of importance, develop plans of action, and write proposals to fund and implement those plans.
- Young people have opportunities to gain knowledge and develop new skills as a result of their involvement and have opportunities to reflect on their own work.
- The organization undertakes meaningful activities to address the issues and needs of young people in the community and does not contrive activities to give youth practice at being adults.
- Youth and adults have opportunities to explore what each brings to the table and to express what they need and expect from the other. They have partnerships focused on common goals. Neither the young person nor adult is necessarily subordinate to the other.
- The organization allocates resources (people and material) to involving youth.
- Young people experience opportunities to achieve successes and to know that they make a difference. Young people develop feelings of self-efficacy.
- Equal numbers of young people and adults comprise advisory boards, councils, and committees.
- Young people and adults experience synergy and believe that they can accomplish more together than they could alone.
- Activities occur in a genuine community rather than in an artificial one created for practice. Activities focus neither on the individual nor on the organization.

***Lessons Learned from the Youth Leadership Institute (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005):***

- **Create pathways for youth leadership development:** Connect youth to organization as a whole instead of a single program.
- **Preparation is a necessity:** Three key components are needed before adults and youth work together.
  - Securing organizational commitment
  - Up front training for both adults and young people
  - Mechanism for ongoing support

- **Moderating program intensity:** Moderating timeframes and spreading training out over modules can help to decrease burnout rates.
- **Investment is necessary:** Staffing investments are significant, but essential at this time.

### ***Programs Examples***

#### **Advocates for Youth (AVY)**

This national non-profit organization's mission is to *champion efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health*. AVY involves youth in many aspects of its work, including a strong Youth Advocates network, several youth-operated websites, and support for integration of youth as advocates in their communities, schools and states for reproductive health rights.

#### **National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy**

This national non-profit was formed in 1996 to decrease the rates of teen pregnancy in the U.S., specifically to see a reduction by one-third within a decade. A key component of the organization's work is a vibrant Youth Leadership team, comprised of 8-12 youth between ages 14-17 from across the country who commit to addressing the issues within their communities as well as serving as an activist/advocate on the national level.

### ***Trainings***

#### **Innovation Center: Initial youth/adult workshop**

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/doc/A1/CYAP\\_pp\\_III-1\\_Welcome\\_Warm-Up\\_Introductions\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/doc/A1/CYAP_pp_III-1_Welcome_Warm-Up_Introductions_Overview.pdf)

This provides a detailed outline and materials for hosting a workshop for a youth-adult partnership (also contains tips and icebreakers).

#### **Youth/Adult Partnership Training PowerPoint**

[www.infoforhealth.org](http://www.infoforhealth.org)

Provides a good general overview about YAP's for the 'uninitiated', and provides some model examples of programs that effectively operate with YAPs regarding youth health and sexual health issues. Training emphasizes research-based best practices from the field.

### 3. Building Leadership Opportunities for Youth

#### *Introduction*

Engaging youth requires ongoing development of adolescents' and young adults' leadership skills. Although leadership development for youth is important, it is often a part of education and development that is overlooked. Opportunities to help youth develop leadership skills are important to teach skills in goal-setting, problem-solving, and decision-making. In addition, fostering early leadership skills helps better prepare youth to be active participants and leaders in their community during adulthood. Research has shown that youth who are leaders are more likely to have higher career aspirations, self-esteem, and higher rates of school completion (Bloomberg, Ganey, Alba, Quintero, & Alcantara, 2003).

This section focuses on resource and training opportunities that promote youth leadership skills, while also helping youth develop new ideas, partnerships, and engage youth and their communities in social change. There are two types of programs featured in this section: 1) Youth-adult partnerships and 2) Leadership trainings for youth. Youth-adult partnerships recognize the importance of the youth perspective and create an environment where both youth and adults can make suggestions and decisions about issues facing youth and/or programs and policies affecting youth. Leadership trainings vary in focus, but are intended to help inspire and develop leadership, service, and innovative skills among youth and their peers through leadership roles (e.g., officer or committee member), practical experiences (e.g., counselor), and as advocates for organizations.

#### *Quick Tips*

##### ***Engaging Youth in Leadership Activities (Advocates for Youth, 2008):***

- Young people gain more from experiences when they are active participants in the program
- Peer education can support young people in developing positive group norms and in making adaptive decisions

##### ***Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships Include (Youth Partnership for Health):***

- **Build a framework:** Gather a group of youth and adults to define the purpose of the partnership. Some issues to address include membership, recruitment, application, and selection process.
- **Recruit youth and adults broadly:** Identify ways to recruit diverse participation (culturally, socio-economically, and geographically).
- **Market the partnership:** Youth in your group can help create materials for marketing to explain the value of their group to both peers and adult recruits.
- **Structure of the group:** Include both adult and youth facilitators.
- **Provide orientation and training:** Once the group has been formed, bring members together for orientation and training. This is an important opportunity to develop skills including group facilitation, public speaking and problem-solving. Team-building exercises also help create a sense of community and purpose.



- **The “Fun” factor:** Remember, you’re working with youth. Meetings should take place in an informal environment or manner, and there should be opportunities for learning, providing input and fun.

### ***Web and Article Resources***

#### **Young Adult Partnerships: A Training Manual**

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National 4-H, National Network for Youth, Youth Leadership Institute (nearly 260 pages)

<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth-AdultPartnershipsTrainingManual.pdf>

Includes a fact sheet about aspects of building effective youth-adult partnerships (can also view this at [www.utextension.utk.edu/4H/sos/acrobat/youth-adult.pdf](http://www.utextension.utk.edu/4H/sos/acrobat/youth-adult.pdf)), training checklist, chapter on sustaining youth-adult partnerships, and more.

The **Ohio 4-H** Website includes both a description of many of the leadership projects they have for youth, but if you scroll down this page, there are about 10 examples of exercises that you can use to help build teen leadership and team building.

[http://www.ohio4h.org/youth/teen\\_leadership/index.html](http://www.ohio4h.org/youth/teen_leadership/index.html)

**Building Partnership for Youth, National 4-H council and University of Arizona** has a fact sheet and related resources that focus on what is leadership, why it is important, and how you can help youth develop leadership skills. <http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/content.cfm?content=leadership>

**Advocates for Youth** has developed resources and resource lists for both youth and adults working in partnership, with many relevant resources on the following two pages:

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/workingwithyouth?task=view> or

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/workingwithyouth/910?task=view>

**Missouri 4-H** has collected a robust list of resources for developing youth-adult partnerships. <http://4h.missouri.edu/programs/yap/resources.htm>

**The Colorado Department of Health** has developed a resource document for engaging youth and includes sections on expectations and challenges of youth-adult partnerships.

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ps/adolschool/healthyyouthcolorado/files/YPHGuidebookFINALVersion2.pdf>

### ***Trainings***

#### **Free Child Project: List of Youth Leadership Development Opportunities**

The Free Child Project has developed a list of organizations that offer youth leadership development opportunities. [http://freechild.org/youth\\_leadership.htm](http://freechild.org/youth_leadership.htm)

#### **Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership Training Programs**

Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership (HOBY) provides youth leadership opportunities and programs throughout the United States with nearly 9,000 students participating annually. <http://www.hoby.org/about.php>

## **Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute Trainers**

Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute has trainers in 48 states/territories and 10 countries. <http://www.pyli.org/>

## 4. Evaluating Youth-Adult Partnerships

### *Introduction*

Evaluating youth-adult programs is essential to better understand the role and effectiveness of youth-adult partnerships in communities. Evaluations allow you to gather information about the activities and outcomes related to the youth-adult partnership to determine if the goals of the partnership are being met. This section highlights several steps to evaluate the process and outcome of youth-adult partnerships, and provides several assessment tools to determine if important elements of youth development are being met through the partnership (Youth Partnership for Health, 2008).

There are two types of evaluations that are discussed in this section: 1) Process evaluations and 2) Outcome evaluations (Youth Partnership for Health, 2008). Process evaluations focus on how the youth-adult partnership functions and the resources that are used during sessions. Outcome evaluations assess whether changes in knowledge, self-efficacy, skills, attitudes, and behaviors occur among participants in the youth-adult partnership. Once the program is evaluated, users are able to identify both strengths and weaknesses of the youth-adult partnership program and make changes to improve the process. There are several assessment tools to evaluate this process which can provide instant feedback to users.

### *Quick Tips*

#### **Conducting an Evaluation of a Youth-Adult Partnership (*Youth Partnership for Health, 2008*):**

- **Starting the evaluation:** The evaluation ideally begins before a program begins, when the program's goals and objectives are being identified. To start evaluating the partnership, there are three steps:
  1. Establish clear and understandable goals and objectives for the partnership.
  2. Identify the purpose of the evaluation.
  3. List the questions the evaluation should answer.
- **Establish the goals and objectives of the evaluation:** The first step in evaluating your partnership is to make sure its goal and objectives are clear and understood by its members (e.g., "How will we know when our goal was met?" or "Is there information available or that can be collected that will tell us if our goal was achieved?").
- **Identify the purpose of the evaluation:** Identify the purpose for evaluating your partnership, determine what you want to show and to whom (e.g., other youth, staff of programs you advise, funders).
- **Identify the questions to be answered by the evaluation:** List the things you want to know about your program to help determine the type of evaluation and information to collect.
- **Using the evaluation results:** Use the information from the evaluation to improve your partnership's services and function. The results of the evaluation should show

what activities your partnership did, who participated and/or received services, and ideally, how well it worked.

### **Web and Article Resources**

#### **Young Adult Partnerships: A Training Manual**

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National 4-H, National Network for Youth, Youth Leadership Institute (nearly 260 pages)

This document has information about assessing progress of youth-adult partnerships.

<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth-AdultPartnershipsTrainingManual.pdf>

#### **Building Partnerships for Youth, National 4-H Council and the University of**

**Arizona** has created an assessment tool to help administrators to assess their capacity to address each of the 21 elements of youth development. [http://cals-](http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/assessment.cfm)

[cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/assessment.cfm](http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/assessment.cfm)

**University of Kentucky** conducted research on how to measure the relationships in youth-adult partnerships. The slide presentation describes the levels of youth-adult partnerships and how to measure the interaction. The exact tool is not provided.

[www.cyfernet.org/article.php?mode=b&c=1398&resource\\_id=9197](http://www.cyfernet.org/article.php?mode=b&c=1398&resource_id=9197). Definitions of the various levels of youth-adults partnerships are provided via this document by Kenneth Jones and Daniel Perkins: <http://resiliency.cas.psu.edu/PDFs/YAP.pdf>

**The Colorado Department of Health** has developed a resource document for engaging youth and includes a section on evaluating youth-adult partnerships.

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ps/adolschool/healthyouthcolorado/files/YPHGuidebookFINALVersion2.pdf>

The **Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development** program has developed an overview of issues and steps to consider in developing an evaluation for a youth development program. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/evaluation/examples.cfm#startcontents>

**Act For Youth** has developed resources on Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE), an approach that engages young people in evaluating the programs, organizations, and systems designed to serve them.

[http://www.actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/evaluation/evaluators/](http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/evaluation/evaluators/)

**CYFERnet (Children, Youth, and Families Education and Resources Network)** has reviewed and assembled an number of Positive Youth Development Evaluation Resources.

<http://www.cyfernet.org/pagelist.php?c=1383>

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