

Sections of the *Youth Involvement in Decision-Making Process* Binder

Overview of Youth Involvement

Document submitted in electronic format (PDF).

Tools

Being Y-AP Savvy: A Primer on Creating & Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships by Shepherd Zeldin and Jessica Collura (2010, June), Center for Nonprofits, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 4-H Youth Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension, and ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, Ithaca, New York. Refer to <http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/YAP-Savvy.pdf>

Youth Adult Engagement: Readiness Assessment – A Youth Infusion Tool. Refer to www.youthinfusion.com

“Youth Friendly Checklist” (pages 40-43) and **“PYD Positive Youth Development Toolkit”** (pages 45-47) taken from **2008 Positive Youth Development Toolkit**. This was a collaborative project of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, the University of Oklahoma’s Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Centers, and the National Child Welfare resource Center for Youth Development. The publication is available through the National Resource Center for Youth Development. Refer to <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/2008-positive-youth-development-toolkit.pdf>

Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations by Shepherd Zeldin, Annette Kusgen McDaniel, Dimitri Topitzes, and Matt Calvert (2000). A publication of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and National 4-H Council, in partnership with the Youth in Governance Taskforce of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents. Refer to http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth_in_Decision_Making_Brochure.pdf

Research Publications

“Youth Involvement in Community Development: Implications and Possibilities for Extension” from **Journal of Extension** (August 2007, Volume 45/Number 4/Feature Articles/4FEA3). Refer to <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/a3.php>

“Improving Public Health through Youth Development” from **Journal of Public Health Management and Practice** (November 2006 Supplement). This supplement presents and discusses youth development (YD) approaches in the context of public health programs. The purpose of the supplement is to acquaint public health practitioners with the basic concepts of YD and to provide guidance about how to put them into practice. These articles have been posted with permission from Wolters Kluwer Health, the publisher of **Journal of Public Health Management and Practice**. For further information, visit the journal website at http://www.health.ny.gov/community/youth/development/journal_supplement.htm

The following articles were selected as research publications for the binder:

“Introduction: Youth Development Is a Public Health Approach” by Guthrie S. Birkhead, Marta H. Riser, Kristine Mesler, Thomas C. Tallon, and Susan J. Klein (*J Public Health Management Practice*, 2006, November (Suppl), S1-S3, 2006 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.).

“Commentary: Adolescent Health and Youth Development: Turning Social Policy Into Public Health” by Richard E. Kreipe (*J Public Health Management Practice*, 2006, November (Suppl), S4-S6, 2006 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.).

“Terms of Engagement: Aligning Youth, Adults, and Organizations Toward Social Change” by Sarah Schulman (*J Public Health Management Practice*, 2006, November (Suppl), S26-S31, 2006 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.).

Commentary: Don’t Make Decisions About Us, Without Us” by Robert Berke, Ann Morse Abdella, and Laurie K. Adams (*J Public Health Management Practice*, 2006, November (Suppl), S48-S50, 2006 Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.).

The final sub-section of Research Publications is entitled **“Understanding Youth Development Principles and Practices”** by Janis Whitlock from the **ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence Research Facts and Findings** (September 2004– A collaboration of Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the New York State Center for School Safety). Refer to www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_understandyd_0904.pdf

Overview of Youth Involvement

Introduction

There is a need to better recognize and understand the benefits and opportunities presented through youth involvement in community development activities. Youth can actively contribute to a variety of activities that enhance local life. If youth are included in programs to meet needs and empower communities, they can become lifelong participants and take on a sense of ownership in development efforts. Recent research has identified that youth must be fully engaged and involved in change efforts at the community level if they are to learn to function as effective members of society (Nitzberg, 2005). Community building, for individuals, focuses on building the capacity and empowerment to identify opportunities for change within or outside of the community.

An understanding of youth motivations and efficacy to this kind of youth involvement and engagement are important for community organizations to understand so that these valuable resources are maximized. As youth are brought into community organizations and civic roles that they have traditionally been excluded from, they can participate in local decision-making at multiple levels. This collaboration leads to skill enhancement, confidence building, and ownership that prepare them as they navigate toward adulthood.

Involving Youth

Youth involvement can benefit organizations and their programs as well as the youth themselves. Programs that are developed in partnership with youth are more likely to be effective at engaging the youth population and, therefore, have a greater impact. Involving youth as partners in making decisions that affect them increases the likelihood that the decisions will be accepted, adopted, and become part of their everyday lives. In addition, empowering youth to identify and respond to community needs helps them become empathetic, reflective individuals, setting them on a course to potentially continue this important work in their future careers. Meaningful youth engagement views youth as equal partners with adults in the decision-making process. Programs and activities are developed *with* youth, rather than *for* youth. In this kind of equal partnership, both adults and young people need to be fully engaged, open to change in how things are done, and share a unified vision for the partnership.

Successful youth/adult partnerships do not just happen. They require preparation and planning. Adopting a Positive Youth Involvement approach to working with young people is an important aspect of the process. Additionally, youth and adults may need coaching and training to develop the skills and competencies necessary to insure that everyone's ideas, decisions, contributions and strengths are listened to and valued. The goals and roles of the partnerships must also be developed with input from both youth and adults included from the beginning. What are some challenges to creating youth/adult partnerships?

- Youth and adults must overcome the stereotypes they have of each other
- Expectations, goals, roles, and responsibilities are not clear.
- Only the "stars" are invited to participate, limiting the diversity and perspectives of the group.
- Lack of planning for sustainability

Considerations for organizations that want to involve youth in a meaningful way

Here are some suggested steps to consider when trying to engage young people and ensure the experience is meaningful for the youth as well as the program.

- Assess

Complete a [Youth Infusion Self-Assessment](#) (example included). Consider where the program currently is on the continuum of youth engagement, and where they would like to be. Not every program or activity can or should always

involve youth. Their level of involvement may vary based on the capacity of program staff to spend time and resources on involving youth, the purpose of involving youth, and support within the organization for involving youth. Organizational infrastructure and support for involving youth is a key concern for sustainability of youth involvement.

- Plan

- Look at the organization's programs and determine where it would be most beneficial and feasible to involve youth. Define the purpose of involving youth in the selected activity. Based on the purpose, determine how to engage youth and the most appropriate level of involvement.
- Talk with other organizations and agencies who are already partnering with young people to learn how they did it and any recommendations they have. Collaborating with other organizations that are engaging youth may help you meet your goals.

-Implement

- Identify how you will recruit youth and how you will keep them engaged in the process. Issues to consider are how to recruit youth who are representative of the population you serve, what skills and capabilities the youth need, and what training should be provided.
- Provide training for organization staff who will be working with youth to ensure they have an understanding of the rationale and purpose of partnering with youth, how it will benefit both the program and the youth, and the skills necessary to effectively work with youth.

- Evaluate

- Develop a plan to review and monitor the youth involvement process.
- Engage the youth and adults who work with them to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of involving youth on the organization and program, as well as its impact on the youth themselves.
- Share successes and challenges with others.

Ways to involve youth throughout the life of a program

There are many ways youth can be involved in organizational decision-making structures and program development. Involving youth from the beginning of a project is ideal; below are suggestions of where youth can be involved.

- Assess

Needs assessment - An example of needs assessment is the USDA's GIS project, through which youth identified resources in their community that were uploaded into a community-wide map. The map was then used to inform community leaders about existing gaps and challenges.

Prioritizing needs - Youth provide an excellent source of human and social capital within communities. Their networks consist of their peers as well as family members and adult friends who have access to local resources. Several federally funded programs are soliciting youth leadership in order to achieve more meaningful results. These programs are tapping into the expertise of young people, relying on them to help determine the needs of their community.

Identifying strategies to meet needs - The National 4-H Council's Engaging Youth, Serving Communities project requires adults to work with youth to organize community forums. The forums can be facilitated in partnership or solely by youth to discuss the needs of the community and how to devise a plan to address them.

Developing strategies/program activities - Youth can help create activities that will be of particular interest to their peers. Many of them are familiar with age appropriate team building exercises and activities that can be incorporated.

- Implement

Promoting program/activities to other youth and adults - Youth should have a lead role in promoting and presenting information that they have created and/or participated in from the beginning. This provides them with ownership of their efforts. They can also identify locations (e.g., libraries, schools, and recreational centers) that are frequented by potential participants.

School health councils/youth advisory boards - Communities are taking the voice of youth more seriously. In rural and urban areas alike, youth serve on such governing bodies as library councils, parks and recreations boards, school boards and even city councils. Many of these give youth full voting privileges. Although this may not be allowed by some organizations, youth can still be given a chance to be heard as a representative of the community in which they live.

Curriculum selection committees - Organizations and agencies are concerned about retaining youth within their programs. Before selecting a particular curriculum to use with a target audience, it may be advantageous to have youth assist in reviewing a curriculum or training materials to determine if it will be appropriate for a specific age group.

Providing technical assistance on youth culture: How to effectively engage youth/how to work with youth - Youth can assist in training adults who are interested in learning about changing dynamics. Youth can share what is of interest to youth in general, conduct a seminar on the relevance and use of web-based social networking, or serve on a panel to talk about what it takes to engage youth of today.

Participating in action research - Young people make excellent data collectors. As they assist in tasks such as conducting interviews, taking photos, and reviewing feedback from surveys, they are also developing analytical skills that can serve them well in other roles.

- Evaluate

Developing evaluation instruments - Youth can brainstorm to create survey questions with adults. Once a draft of the survey is completed, youth can fill out the instrument, and then provide feedback on what items were clear and unclear.

Developing criteria for success - Soliciting honest feedback from youth will help build methods into the evaluation process that can strengthen a program or project. Youth can provide insight on what outcomes they would like to see as a result of program efforts.

Collecting evaluation data - Youth can take photographs of the final results of project work, administer surveys, conduct structured interviews, or participate in focus groups.

Assisting in analyzing results - With the assistance of adults, youth can learn how to enter data into software programs, read through data to sort out common themes, and help with interpreting comments, reactions, and behaviors generated by participants. A guide (e.g., observation protocol) describing what to look for during the analysis may be helpful.

Presenting results - Once youth have had a role in all levels of a program, most are more than willing to share the results of their hard work. Giving them the opportunity to share what a difference the experience has made in their lives will also resonate with the audience. This is very important if youth are presenting information to local leaders who can serve as potential partners and also help make a difference in the community.

Key Principles of Positive Youth Involvement

When connecting youth to positive experiences, programs should include the following principles:

- Positive youth involvement is an intentional process. It is about being proactive to promote protective factors in young people.
- Positive youth involvement complements efforts to prevent risky behaviors and attitudes in youth, and complements efforts that work to address negative behaviors.
- Youth assets are both acknowledged and employed through youth involvement. All youth have the capacity for positive growth and development.
- Youth involvement enables youth to thrive and flourish in their teen years, and prepares them for a healthy, happy and safe adulthood.
- Youth engagement involves youth as active agents. Adults may set the structure, but youth are not just the recipients of services. Youth are valued and are encouraged to bring their assets to the table. Adults and youth work in partnership.
- Youth leadership development may be a part of youth involvement, but youth are not required to lead. Youth can attend, actively participate, contribute, or lead (through positive youth involvement) activities.
- Youth participation may involve civic involvement and civic engagement—youth contribute through service to their communities.
- Positive youth involvement often engages every element of the community—schools, homes, community members, and others. Young people are valued through this process. Positive youth involvement is an investment that the community makes in young people. Youth and adults work together to frame the solutions. Learn more about engaging youth as active participants and partners at <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development/key-principles-positive-youth-development>.

Integrating and Involving Youth into Programs

First and foremost, all youth serving organizations should work towards assuring that young people have the chance to develop across all aspects of their lives in order to acquire the most positive experience possible. Youth involvement strategies include giving youth access to experiences that build leadership, boost self-awareness, and connect youth to caring adults. A comprehensive review of the research literature focused on community programs for youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), identified key environmental factors and experiences that have been found to promote positive youth involvement and development. They include:

Physical and Psychological Safety

A program should provide ground rules that are developed and posted by the youth participants. Adequately trained staff members who understand respect are essential to prevent bullying and hazing situations. A program should also include youth and adults trained in team-building who can understand and recognize symptoms of cliques and find alternative means for using group and team-building exercises.

Appropriate Structure

A program should provide appropriate youth-to-adult ratios for supervision, a system for ensuring youth are welcomed when they arrive, and a balance for different learning styles in programmatic activities.

Supportive Relationships

Programs should create opportunities where youth share and interests are known and provide trained staff in handling conflict, recognizing symptoms of withdrawal, and understanding how to engage youth without singling them out.

Opportunities to Belong

A program should provide opportunities for youth to be engaged in small group activities based upon interest, and structured team building should be provided to ensure all youth have a chance to get acquainted. To feel involved, opportunities for sharing need to be incorporated into each and every activity.

Positive Social Norms

Programs should engage youth in creating a respectful environment and involve a respect for diversity and culture in activities.

Opportunities to Make a Difference

A program should engage youth in exploring career and workforce opportunities, provide occasions for goal setting, and create opportunities to make a difference in service learning or peer support.

Opportunities for Skill Development

Programs should provide opportunities to master and apply skills, and should engage youth in determining choices toward progression of new levels of learning.

Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts

If, and when appropriate, a program needs to incorporate ways to engage parents and/or guardians, staff, and youth participants either through family activities, newsletters, websites, and program policies. Programs should be aware of when youth are in or out of school and plan accordingly to support youth and their families in extended programming opportunities.

Assessing Youth Involvement and Engagement

Involving youth and encouraging their participation is important in promoting positive youth development. Youth need to be fully engaged in programs as active participants. Their participation should be sustained, and they should be able to translate the skills and experiences gained within the program to their greater communities. To ensure that youth are actively engaged, programs should regularly assess youth involvement and engagement. Assessment tools can assist organizations and community partnerships in determining how they involve youth in programs, whether youth are becoming more engaged in the community, and if certain strategies are helping to retain youth. An example of an assessment tool is included in this notebook.

Youth Representation & Introduction to Youth Councils

Youth councils are a form of youth voice engaged in community decision-making. Youth representation exists at local, state, provincial, regional, national, and international levels among governments, NGOs, schools, and other entities. Youth voice refers to the distinct ideas, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and actions of young people as a collective body. The term youth voice often groups together a diversity of perspectives and experiences, regardless of backgrounds, identities, and cultural differences. It is frequently associated with the successful application of a variety of youth activities, including service learning, youth research, and leadership training. Additional research has shown that engaging youth voice is an essential element of effective organizational development among community and youth-serving organizations.

In the United States there are several forms of youth councils. They include:

- **Youth advisory councils** provide input and feedback regarding adult-driven decision-making;

- **Youth research councils** that are responsible for assessment and evaluation of youth and community programs, and;
- **Youth action councils** which are designed to either be youth/adult partnerships or youth-led activities that are youth-driven and generally, youth-focused.
- **A new breed of Youth Council** also exists that include a perspective on "leadership", which is not always interpreted in the same way from one generation to the next. This form of Youth Council embraces all of the above mentioned qualities; advisory, assessment & evaluation skills & the importance of partnering etc., as well as the *traditional consideration* of gaining access to what timeless knowledge that may still be of value and, in theory, the effect of "the path of leadership on our current leaders" and what kind of examples there are to study (if any) and capitalize/maximize of what is worthy and on-going.

Examples of youth involvement structures are outlined in the following table:

Organization Profiles

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Youth Board Governance</i>	<i>Youth Infusion</i>
Center for Youth as Resources Washington, DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 youth board members (ages 16 to 21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time youth staff • Youth interns • Youth trainers • Youth conference presenters
Hampton Coalition for Youth Hampton, VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-member city Youth Commission (ages 14 to 18) • 5 additional city boards/commissions with youth members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Planners (paid youth staff) • Superintendent's Advisory Group • Principal's Advisory Group • Teen Advisory Group to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board • All neighborhood planning efforts involve youth • Youth interns • Youth trainers
National 4-H Council Chevy Chase, MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 youth on 45-member board of directors (ages 12 to 22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth interns • Youth staff • Youth involved in program design and implementation • Youth conference presenters • Youth project assistants • Youth trainers • Youth tour guides
Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League Washington, DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 youth on 15-member board of directors (ages 16 to 23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth involved in community outreach • Youth Council (advises youth board members)
Looking Glass Station 7 Eugene, OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 youth on 16-member board of directors (age 18) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth advisory board • Youth peer counselors • Youth involved in program design and implementation
United Methodist Youth Organization Nashville, TN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth dominated administrative board—20 youth and 10 adults (ages 12 to 18) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth decision-making doesn't extend much beyond the board

Organization Profiles

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Youth Board Governance</i>	<i>Youth Infusion</i>
Wisconsin 4-H Foundation Madison, WI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 youth on 20-member board of directors (ages 17 to 21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth infused throughout Wisconsin 4-H system, but 4-H Foundation involvement is limited to the board
Youth Leadership Institute San Francisco, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 members under age 25 on board of directors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth staff • Youth involved in program design and implementation • Youth theatrical educators • Youth workshop facilitators • Youth interns • Youth advisory board to the Marin County Board of Supervisors
Bethel/West Eugene Teen Courts Eugene, OR	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth run court (youth serve as jurors, clerks, bailiffs, defendant advisors, and case presenters) • Youth member on staff hiring committee • Youth conference presenters
Center for Young Women's Development San Francisco, CA	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entire staff composed of youth—adults only present on board of directors
Federal Hocking High School Stewart, OH	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Council with administrative power • Youth members on all-school committees • Student staff-hiring committee • Student initiated clubs • Student input in classroom decisions
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network New York, NY	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth input into programming efforts • Youth organized to push for board representation
Huckleberry Youth Programs San Francisco, CA	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer health educators • Minimal input into program design
Turner Youth Development Initiative Bozeman, MT	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program development, implementation, & marketing • Radio show hosts • Staff hiring
Y-Press Indianapolis, IN	No youth board governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff composed primarily of youth, including youth reporters and youth editors • Youth involved in staff hiring • Youth involved in programming and implementation