National Youth Collaboration Toolkit

A PRACTICAL RESOURCE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI

This Toolkit is a work in progress.

One of the areas we are continuing to evolve our thinking on is language. When we began working on this toolkit we used the term “youth engagement”. Now we are using “youth voice” and ”youth collaboration”. For the most part this toolkit uses youth engagement.

Please share your feedback with us at info@awayhome.ca

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1 WELCOME

1.1 WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR

This toolkit is for people, organizations, and community groups that want or need to "engage" youth. To get their ideas, their help, their direction, their cooperation... their meaningful involvement. That might be in planning, decision-making, organizing an event, conducting research, learning about the community, designing a new program, strategizing, or any other activity that actually influences youth and the world around them.

Organizations that might find this useful include:

- Non-profit organizations
- Planning committees
- Municipal advisory committees
- Businesses
- Ad-hoc project committees
- Community groups
- School-based planning groups
- Teachers and educators

> Youth Engagement – The meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity which has a focus outside him or herself.

The toolkit is written primarily for "adult allies" of youth who may already be attempting to engage youth or planning to do so. However, the toolkit may also be useful to youth-led, youth-initiated groups that want to improve what they already do.

> Adult Ally – An adult ally helps youth have their voice heard through meaningful engagement.

If you find yourself asking any of the following questions, then you should find something in this toolkit to help:

- How can our organization involve youth in meaningful ways?
- Should our group even attempt to engage youth?

- How do we know if we're ready for meaningful youth engagement?
- What does it mean to share power with youth?
- How could we possibly engage at-risk youth, or youth who've experienced homelessness or trauma?
- How can we make sure that youth have the tools to make meaningful contributions?
- How might adult allies and youth work together at the committee level?
- How do we recruit youth for our community group or advisory committee?
- How can we retain youth in our community group or advisory committee?
- How can we ensure the safety (emotional, psychological, and physical) of the youth that we engage in our processes?
- How do we ensure that youth know they've made a meaningful contribution?
- How do we communicate effectively with youth?
- How do we establish and work with a new youth group?
- How can we involve youth in organizing a youth event?
- How do we consult with and gather input from youth?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Allies in Action: Two Workshops for Adults Who Want to Be Allies to Young People

- Designed by the Saskatoon Action Circle on Youth Sexuality, the first of two workshops is devoted broadly to youth engagement, while the second focused more on sexual health and youth sexuality
- http://www.engagementcentre.ca/files/allies_e.pdf

Adult Allies in Action

- Background and reflective exercises for adult allies
- http://www.engagementcentre.ca/files/alliesfinal_e_web.pdf

Adult Ally Traffic Lights (pp. 78-79 in Supporting Youth in our Communities)

- A simple reflection on the status of different youth engagement practices in your organization
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities.pdf

Adult Ally Self-Reflection (pp. 80-82 in Supporting Youth in our Communities)

- A self-reflection exercise that requires you to consider your attitudes and approaches to youth http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities.pdf

1.2 HOW CAN I USE THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit is designed to provide you with knowledge and ideas to engage youth effectively. It also contains tools to help you assess your organization's ability to engage youth and resources that will help you do it.

If you read every section, you will have a good understanding of both the philosophy of youth engagement and practical methods for engaging youth. Reading the entire toolkit is best, but if you're looking for knowledge or advice on specific topics, then feel free to browse the contents list and skip to whatever section you consider useful. Links to useful tools and resources appear throughout.

Section 1 – Welcome provides background to the toolkit.

Section 2 – Ideas and Exploration presents some key ideas, philosophy, and models of youth engagement.

Section 3 – Preparing to Engage Youth provides tools for organizations to assess their organizational readiness and do some of the groundwork necessary before engaging youth.

Section 4 – Tips and Best Practices presents practical advice on key topics in youth engagement.

Section 5 – Resources and Tools provides a list of all the resources and tools recommended throughout the toolkit.

1.3 HOW DID THIS TOOLKIT COME ABOUT?

This toolkit is grounded in the experiences of a group of youth called Youth Against Youth Homelessness and their adult support team in Kamloops, British Columbia.

In the fall of 2012, Kamloops was chosen as one of two pilot communities for the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness (MLC), Program initiated by the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, Eva's Initiatives, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. The purpose of the MLC program was to raise awareness of youth homelessness and support communities in their efforts to address the problem through the creation of youth homelessness action plans. The program partners increased and evolved into A Way Home Canada.

In Kamloops, this process began with a decision by the "support team," as they eventually came to see themselves, to recruit a group of youth to fulfill the program mandate, i.e. raise awareness and creation of an action plan. Realizing that what they were doing was, broadly speaking, "youth engagement," the support team went searching for tools and advice. They did indeed find some resources, but, as they went about their efforts to recruit, to train, to work alongside, and to learn from the youth group, they encountered a series of challenges and opportunities that they had not been prepared for.

The support team and youth group grew to be partners, working together as a committee, sometimes formally, sometimes informally, and sometimes wondering where the entire project was going and how it should get there. Together, they formed Youth Against Youth Homelessness. Their work involved conducting focus groups, doing research, producing a video about youth homelessness, raising public awareness, and organizing events. This work culminated in a plan to end youth homelessness in Kamloops called A Way Home.

This toolkit represents an effort to crystalize the learnings, challenges, opportunities, and experiences of this youth-adult partnership, along with the experiences of hundreds of others across the country who have been doing similar work. Many of the ideas in this toolkit come from other amazing toolkits and youth engagement resources throughout Canada, as well as relevant scholarly research.

Youth Homelessness – Why?

[a video by Youth Against Youth Homelessness]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1F-YFBeWmo

1.4 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While this toolkit was born out of the experiences of Youth Against Youth Homelessness, it is actually a massive collaborative effort. It owes a debt to a wide variety of community organizers, youth workers, youth, researchers, and writers. This list of people includes, but is not limited to:

- Marian Anderberg, Thompson Rivers University
- John-Paul Baker, Consultant and Writer
- Nicole Beauregard, City of Kamloops
- Shelly Bonnah, Interior Community Services
- Mackenzie Cassels, Youth Advisor
- Michelle Davies, Thompson Nicola Cariboo United Way
- Marjorie Edgington, Boys and Girls Club of Kamloops
- Tara Everitt, Kingston Home Base Non-Profit Housing, Inc.
- Devin Gambler, Bladerunners
- Will George, Youth Advisor
- Caroline Hilland, BC School District 73
- Bonnie Klohn, Urban Systems
- Naomi Leadbeater, Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation
- Claire Macleod, City of Kamloops
- Sarah MacKinnon, Boys and Girls Club of Kelowna
- Lesley McMillan, A Way Home Canada
- Carmin Mazzotta, City of Kamloops
- Mary-Jane McKitterick, A Way Home Canada
- Katherine McParland, A Way Home / Interior Community Services
- Marisa Silver, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
- Bhavana Varma, United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington

2 IDEAS and EXPLORATION

2.1 WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

According to the Centre for Excellence for Youth Engagement, it is:

> The meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity which has a focus outside him or herself.

"meaningful" – this means it is relevant to a young person's life, as defined by the young person; it also means that there is impact, on the young person, the organization, and/or the community; activities that are tokenist, in which youth have no impact, are not meaningful

"participation" – this means that youth engagement is a process that is "dynamic, reciprocal, and interactive" (McCart & Clark, 2005); participation does not mean receiving a service; true participation is not as simple as welcoming youth as volunteers, interns, or junior staff members

"sustained" – this means that the involvement lasts through time, leading to positive outcomes and the chance to see the results of their efforts; sustaining engagement is, in fact, one of the greatest challenges (for both organizations and youth themselves), and it is sometimes short-term or time-limited activities which can lay the foundation for sustained engagement

"young person" – for the purposes of this toolkit, "youth" is defined roughly as aged 15 to 24; that said, defining youth by age is difficult because developmental trajectories are so diverse (Franke, 2010)

"a focus outside him or herself" – this means that a young person is engaged in and contributing to a broader group, an organization, or a community; while the young person him or herself may benefit, this comes through a purpose beyond the self

2.2 WHY ENGAGE YOUTH?

To organizations and individuals that already do youth engagement, reasons for engaging youth are obvious. Some people might turn this question around and ask it in the negative: why ***not*** engage youth? To those who are convinced that youth engagement is important, the simple answer is "because it's the right thing to do." But we would like to suggest that the reasons need to be articulated more clearly, in part because many well-intentioned youth engagement activities don't succeed.

Reasons to Engage Youth:

- To promote youth development
- To support young people's rights
- To radically empower youth
- As part of a broad stakeholder engagement strategy
- To improve or strengthen an organization
- To improve or strengthen a service
- To build a civil society
- Because it looks good to the public or to funders

Besides, organizations and individuals who are not currently engaging youth might need a better or clearer answer to this question. Youth engagement is hard. So why upset the status quo? There are, in fact, several good reasons for engaging youth.

For those who identify with the last reason in this list, it is our sincere hope that you will still read this toolkit and anchor your strategy and activities, instead, in several of the other reasons. After all, ***authenticity*** is one of the core principles of youth engagement. If you are looking for easy solutions, you will find few. Youth engagement is not an activity, or a program, or an event. It is an approach.

This toolkit should provide some understanding of that approach. And if youth engagement is completely new, somewhat alien, or intimidating, fear not. You don't have to turn your organization upside down to begin engaging youth. There is something here for everyone.

2.3 WAYS OF ENGAGING YOUTH

We have defined youth engagement in fairly abstract terms. Now let's look over some more ground-level examples or ways of engaging youth.

Ways of Engaging Youth

- Service delivery – youth may serve as volunteers in youth-focused programs and services
- Research and evaluation – youth may conduct research on their own or in partnership with staff and assist with or conduct program and service evaluation
- Training – youth may participate in both the design and delivery of training for staff at all levels
- Outreach – youth may participate in planning and advising youth-focused organizations on outreach activities
- Activism – youth may participate in planning and execution of events, public awareness activities, and social justice advocacy
- Communication and media – youth may participate in the planning and conducting of public awareness campaigns, video production, and communication strategy
- Planning – youth may participate in the development of organizational or community-wide plans
- Fundraising – youth may design and conduct fundraising campaigns
- Governance – youth may serve on boards and committees to provide oversight for organizations, projects, and community work
- Policy-making – youth may participate in discussions and writing of policy for organizations and community plans

In Section 3 – Preparing to Engage Youth, you will learn more about which methods of engagement are suitable for your organization or group.

2.4 BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The question “Why Engage Youth?” leads logically to another question: “What are the benefits of youth engagement?” Youth engagement benefits youth, of course, or it should. If it doesn’t, then it’s not true youth engagement. And it also benefits the adult allies who engage youth, as well as the groups, organizations, programs, and services within which all of them work. Finally, youth engagement benefits the community, or society, as a whole. A literature review conducted by the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (see 5.2 Theory and Ideas for link) outlines these benefits.

Impacts on young people:

- Personal development
- Building of skills, knowledge, and capacity
- Reduction in negative risk behaviours
- Positive academic outcomes and lower failure rates
- A sense of connectedness to school community
- Increased civic engagement
- Better relationships and interpersonal skills and social networks
- Learning from adults about community and resources

Impacts on adult allies:

- Overcoming youth stereotypes
- Greater energy, passion, and optimism
- Greater sense of collective purpose and commitment to organization
- New perspectives on decision-making
- Enhanced connection with others in organizations

Impacts on programs & services:

- More responsive to youth needs
- Better program development
- Increased use / access of services
- Improved staff abilities to serve youth
- Increased program evaluation
- Better information sharing with youth

Impacts on the organization:

- Improved relevance and effectiveness of decisions
- Improved efficiency
- Culture of inclusion
- Identification of systematic inequalities
- Greater influence on policy-makers outside the organization
- Better connections between decision-making and programming
- Greater innovation
- Better focus on diversity
- Better outreach and advocacy
- Greater clarity in mission and vision
- Greater credibility with funders

These benefits are listed here not simply to justify youth engagement practices. They should be studied by engaging organizations, even prioritized, because at times these benefits may compete. That is, in some cases you must decide which benefits are more important than others. When benefits to an organization vastly outweigh those to youth, the engagement will probably be difficult to sustain. And when benefits to youth vastly outweigh those to the organization, there may be resistance to the activities from within. In any case, you must determine what the right balance is for your particular strategy.

If you complete **Section 3 – Preparing to Engage Youth**, you will see be asked to identify which of the benefits are most important to you.

2.5 WHY DO YOUTH BECOME ENGAGED?

Before attempting to engage youth, it's a good idea to understand some of the reasons why youth might engage with activities. But first, it's important to note that "engaging," while beneficial, may not come naturally to all youth. There are many youth who have ***not*** been involved in community development, social justice issues, or even fun social activities with no strings attached. And for many, it is because they haven't been given or sought out the opportunity. In that respect – and in many many others– they're not much different than adults.

Reasons Youth Become Engaged

- Personal interest in the issue or activity
- Professional or personal benefit from participating
- Inspiration from another person or from an event or situation
- The need or desire for social contact
- The desire to make a change in the world or their community
- The desire to have a voice

Of course, there are young people who seek out engagement opportunities, and these youth may be worthy of engaging. But we should never make the mistake of assuming that voice is the right only of those who are both aware of and exercise their rights. And the youth you may want to engage are not necessarily the ones who come knocking on your door. You might have to knock on theirs.

Youth Remain Engaged in an Activity if it...

1. Taught them new skills or knowledge
2. Helped them with their life goals
3. Included things that they were passionate about
4. Allowed them to feel they were giving back to the community
5. Gave them a feeling of value, confidence, respect, and belongingness
6. Gave them a social network
7. Gave them an experience of making decisions and being a part of creating a better service for others
8. Allowed them to see results

In fact, there may be different answers to why youth ***become*** engaged and why youth ***remain*** engaged. And to answer the latter, we can add responses from participants of Eva's Phoenix and Greater Toronto's Youth Outreach and Intervention. These youth reported that engaging activities were those that:

One thing to notice in these lists is there is nothing about "helping an organization achieve its goals." Of course, if an organization's goal is to "change the world" or "create a better service," then youth may help the organization achieve its goal. But ***there is no reason to expect that a young person will be loyal to your organizational objectives in and of themselves.***

Many youth engagement efforts fall apart when organizational or logistical needs overshadow the ultimate goal of changing society for the better. And in this way, youth can actually help keep organizations focused on their broader vision and mission. If the youth you've attempted to engage have stopped showing up, perhaps it's time to look closely at whether your organization is working actively toward its mission, or simply working to sustain itself as an organization. There's an important difference.

2.6 10 PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Successfully engaging youth and realizing its benefits can be achieved by the following core principles. You should revisit this list throughout your engagement practice. Ask yourself openly and honestly: are we following these principles? You may even want to ask the youth themselves how you're doing. Failure to follow these principles may not only negate the benefits of youth engagement, it can also cause damage to the youth, emotionally or mentally. Therefore it is critical that you consider this list before undertaking your strategy or activities. In fact, almost everything in this toolkit attempts to explain how to follow these principles.

10 Principles of Youth Engagement

1. Respect
2. Authenticity
3. Support
4. Sharing of power and information
5. Healthy relationships
6. Safety
7. Youth self-determination
8. Anti-oppressive practice
9. Developmental perspective
10. Flexibility

1. Respect

Respect for youth underlies all efforts at youth engagement. Respect involves listening, acknowledging, accepting, and honoring. This is demonstrated through how we communicate, relate to, and treat youth, as well as how we accommodate, support, and teach them. Respect means valuing youth for who they are (not what we think they should be), valuing their ideas and opinions for what they are (not only for how they serve our organization's goals), and valuing their strengths (not simply accepting them despite their supposed deficiencies). Moreover, we must respect ***individuals,*** not just "youth" as a group. Through respect, we gain trust. If you are engaging youth with histories of trauma, abuse, marginalization, homelessness, discrimination, or ostracization, trust may not be granted so freely, and it may be lost quite easily.

2. Authenticity

Respect is closely related to authenticity. Ongoing research by the Boys and Girls Club of Canada on youth engagement, in which they spoke with youth and service providers, identified authenticity as one of the most important keys to engagement. Being authentic means being real and sincere about wanting to engage youth. Asking youth for their input when you know that it's not going to change anything is not authentic. It's false. And youth in general, and youth with lived experience specifically, are very good judges of authenticity. If you don't truly value them or want to support them in their development, they'll know.

3. Support

Engagement doesn't mean simply inviting youth to your meeting, event, or activity. It means supporting the meaningful participation of those individuals. Support covers a wide variety of ideas. It means providing training, explaining expectations, accommodating in terms of logistics, providing food, and giving opportunities for learning. We must support youth emotionally, socially, and intellectually according to their individual needs. And we must give them the tools and knowledge to achieve the goals of a given project. Engagement without support is not sustainable, nor respectful.

4. Sharing of Power and Information

If you don't share power, your efforts may only lead to ***attendance***, not ***participation***. Valuing youth's input means allowing that input to influence decisions, planning, and operations. If you cannot identify any real change that has resulted from your youth engagement activities, then you haven't shared power, and your efforts are inauthentic. We must also be open with information and commit to organizational transparency. Anything less, and youth may feel duped.

5. Healthy relationships

Respect, authenticity, support, and power-sharing are necessary to build healthy relationships with youth, and the quality of your relationship will translate into the quality of your engagement practices. Again, you are building relationships with ***individuals***, not simply a representative group of people. Constructive relationships are the foundation of all collaborative work, whether it's in the realm of family, business, social services, or community development. And it's not only the relationships between adult allies and youth that must be fostered, but among youth themselves.

6. Safety

Young people will only participate if they feel that the environment, adult allies, and organizational structure can ensure both physical and psychological safety. This means arranging meetings and events at suitable locations and times, assuring that interactions are non-violent and non-threatening, and that there is emotional support in dealing with tough issues. It also means not tolerating harassment or discrimination of any type and ensuring that participation is optional, not coerced.

7. Youth self-determination

According to the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness' Youth Engagement Toolkit, "we need to actively live the understanding that self-determination and independence require an intact sense of personal responsibility (6)." We must engage youth on their terms, not ours. This is necessary in order to promote a sense of agency and control, without which people may feel their engagement is hopeless and may damage their confidence and sense of self.

8. Anti-oppressive practice

Anti-oppressive practices or approaches require us to acknowledge how an individual's situation and experience are not only the result of individual choices but a result of social norms, systems, and small "p" political forces. We must acknowledge, understand, and resist oppressive social forces such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism. These forces exist not only ***between*** groups and individuals, but within oppressed individuals themselves, and overcoming them requires meaningful participation in programming, planning, and evaluation.

9. Developmental perspective

Young people are in a process of becoming. They are still negotiating their own identities, their place in the world, and their relationships with other people and social structures. We must accept them as individuals where they are, not where we would like them to be. And we should provide the support, mentorship, and learning opportunities that will help them develop, in all ways, in healthy directions that they wish for.

10. Flexibility

Following from every other principle is the idea that youth engagement practices must be flexible and responsive to youth needs and desires. Unwillingness to adapt, regarding everything from mission to logistics, may lead to disengagement and disillusionment. In this way, we should view youth engagement as an open-ended process, and while we may identify starting points and desired outcomes, we must remain open to the possibility that the shape our efforts takes is not exactly what we imagined in the beginning.

2.7 BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth engagement isn't always easy. There are a multitude of barriers that prevent effective youth engagement from happening. Some of these exist in the youth and some in the organization or group attempting to engage the youth.

Barriers within Youth

If you believe, from your experience or from what you have read, that engaging youth is difficult, have you ever considered how difficult it might be to be an "engaged" youth? Someone is asking you for your time, energy, and passion. This may mean stepping far outside your comfort zone and placing trust in people and organizations that you're unfamiliar with. And it may mean doing so when you have so many other things in life to deal with, including school, identity-forming, and expectations from family members and friends. Some youth may be preoccupied by survival, dealing with trauma, or overcoming abusive relationships. Of course, youth ***do*** find reasons to be engaged, as we've outlined, but it's important to understand the many very good reasons why youth ***don't*** become engaged.

Barriers to Youth Engagement Within Youth

1. Lack of knowledge and information
2. Lack of time
3. Stress and conflict
4. Readiness
5. Lack of incentives
6. Lack of confidence or perceived ability
7. Self-protection
8. Language and culture
9. Peer pressure
10. Apathy or cynicism

Lack of Knowledge and Information: Many youth are not engaged in volunteer activities, community development, or social justice issues simply because they are unaware of opportunities for doing so. In the course of our research, we asked many young people why they were not involved, and by far the most common answer was that they hadn't been asked or they didn't know about opportunities. In some cases, or some communities, there is indeed a shortage of opportunities for youth to be engaged, turning the barrier of "ignorance" to one of "lack of opportunity."

Lack of Time: Many young people have busy lives. School, extracurricular activities, hobbies, family life, and friends all compete for attention. And many youth also need to focus first on meeting their basic needs of food and shelter or must work to earn the money they need to survive.

Stress and Conflict: Youth, particularly adolescence, can be an extremely challenging time in the best of circumstances. Young people are undergoing physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual, and social transformations. The experience of homelessness, marginalization, discrimination, trauma, or abuse can add even more stress, as can conflict among family members, peers, or with adults in positions of authority and the systems they represent. Stress can leave little energy for engagement in volunteer activities, even if those activities may provide benefits that help alleviate that stress.

Readiness: Sustaining meaningful participation requires a certain level of maturity and commitment, and not every young person is ready for that. They may be at some point in the future, but at the current time engagement may be, for all of the other reasons in this list, out of the question.

Lack of Incentive: With so many things competing for a young person's time and energy, including both needs and interests, engagement may not be attractive enough without some kind of incentive. Incentives may be tangible, including money or gift cards, or intangible, including social networks and learning opportunities.

Lack of Confidence or Perceived Ability: Being engaged requires self-confidence. Many young people, in part because they've been consistently or systematically undervalued, may not have that required confidence or feel they don't have anything to give.

Self-protection: Many youth have had negative or harmful experiences engaging with adults who present themselves as allies or guardians. Betrayal, the breaking of trust, or abuse of different forms will drive many young people to disengage from adults and their systems. Youth may feel that engaging, even with an apparently well-meaning community organization, will plug them into a system that does not have their best interests at heart.

Language and Culture: Youth who do not feel comfortable or proficient in the language or predominant culture of the engaging group may not be willing to engage. This may be especially true for Indigenous youth and newcomers.

Peer Pressure: Young people, particularly those involved in street culture, depend on their peers for support, approval, and even survival. If their peers disapprove of engagement with community organizations or processes, a young person has a strong disincentive.

Apathy or Cynicism: We must reject stereotypes of young people as inherently apathetic, but it is true that some are not willing to become engaged because they feel that nothing will change as result of their efforts. Indeed, previous experiences with youth engagement may have already demonstrated this to them. In this way, poor engagement practices will discourage future engagement.

Barriers within Organizations

Of course, barriers to youth engagement do not only exist within the youth themselves. Many aspects of an organization may make youth engagement difficult, or make youth unwilling to engage with the organization or group.

Organizational Barriers to Youth Engagement

1. Lack of resources
2. Lack of time
3. Lack of engagers
4. Risk and liability
5. Organizational culture
6. Working structures
7. Lack of skills or preparation
8. Lack of organizational commitment
9. Lack of common understanding
10. Perceptions of youth
11. Lack of engagement options
12. Perceptions of the difficulty of youth engagement

Lack of Resources: Youth engagement may cost an organization both human and financial resources for staffing, programming, appropriate space, food, transportation, office supplies, and different forms of support.

Lack of Time: Successful youth engagement, as described in the core principles, means more than just inviting youth into structures that already exist. It means supporting them in their involvement, and that requires time that many organizations are already short on.

Lack of Engagers: Key engagers are those people who, through experience, training, predisposition, or personality, are good at engaging youth. While an organization might have the time and resources to devote, they may lack the right people.

Risk and Liability: Engaging youth introduces new risks to an organization, which needs to ensure that they have the right measures and policies in place concerning safety, social media, training, and appropriate boundary-setting.

Organizational Culture: Youth engagement may be a difficult undertaking for organizations that do not already have a participatory culture, with flattened organizational structure and democratic decision-making. An organization may not be, in other ways, “youth friendly” or it may be perceived as unfriendly by youth.

Working Structures: If an organization or its key engagers are inaccessible physically (because of their location) or cannot accommodate youth's schedules, engagement practices may be limited. Even if schedule and location are not issues, the working environment itself may not be very accommodating – or safe – for youth.

Lack of Skills or Preparation: An organization and its employees or volunteers may simply lack the right skills and knowledge necessary to successfully engage youth.

Lack of Organizational Commitment: Efforts to engage youth need broad support from within the organization. Without this commitment, it will be a challenge for the engagers to dedicate the right resources and demonstrate the required flexibility to sustain youth engagement.

Lack of Common Understanding: Within an organization, different people may have vastly different understandings of what youth engagement is and entails. This can lead to conflict over approach and a lack of consistency in activities and engagement strategy.

Perceptions of Youth: There are many perceptions of youth that lead organizations to believe that they can't be engaged. These perception include ideas that youth are unpredictable, irrational, or delinquent, and that they are inexperienced, lacking in key skills, and incapable of participation. Deficit-based approaches to dealing with youth are not conducive to engagement.

Lack of Engagement Options: Sometimes an organization will only see one way for youth to be engaged, and if that way doesn't work for the youth, then there's no engagement.

Perception of the Difficulty of Youth Engagement: Considering everything contained in this toolkit, the principles and qualities of positive youth engagement, and the long list of barriers, some organizations simply decide that it's too tough to engage youth effectively.

2.8 MODELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Hart's Ladder of Participation

Youth engagement (and, more broadly, children and youth's participation) is not a new concept. In 1989, the world saw the birth of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a watershed event that enshrined certain key rights for children and youth, including the right to form and express their own opinions, the right to access information, and the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. The UNCRC helped pave the way for an emphasis on "listening to" and "consulting with" youth. However, consulting with youth falls short of real engagement, and in 1995 Roger Hart published his "ladder of participation," which is displayed in virtually every youth engagement toolkit.

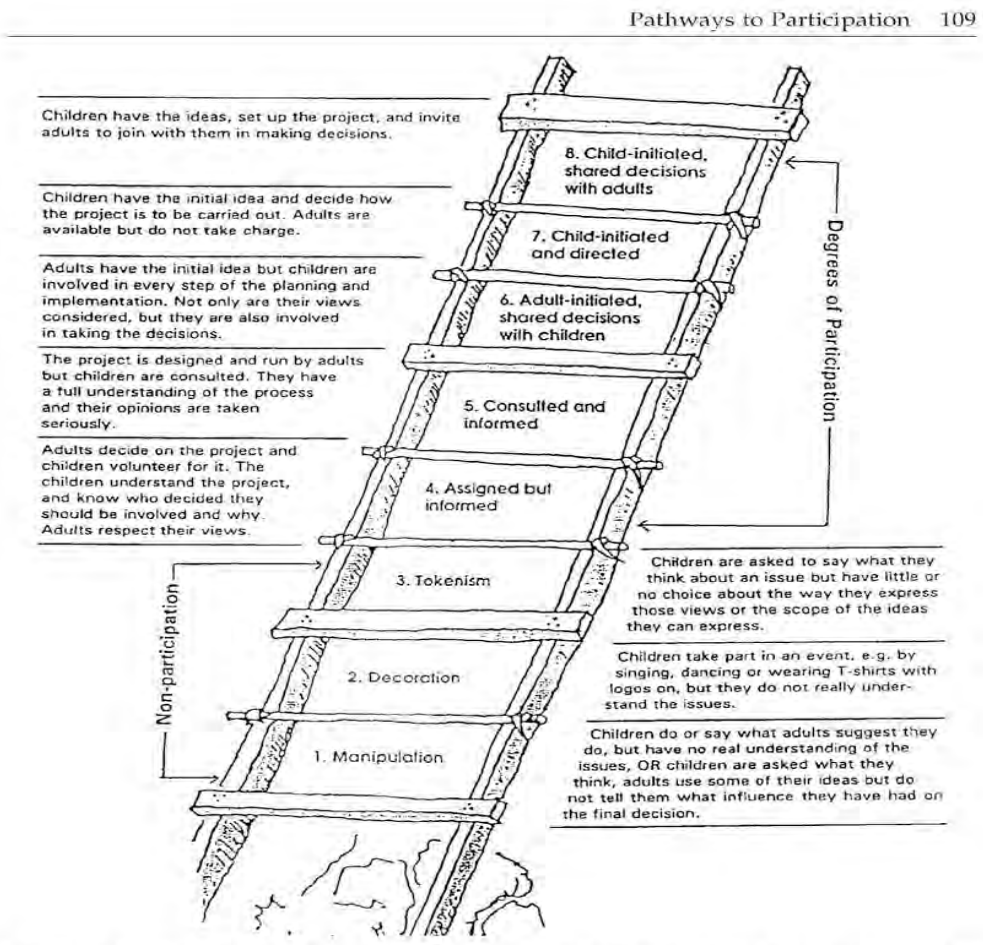
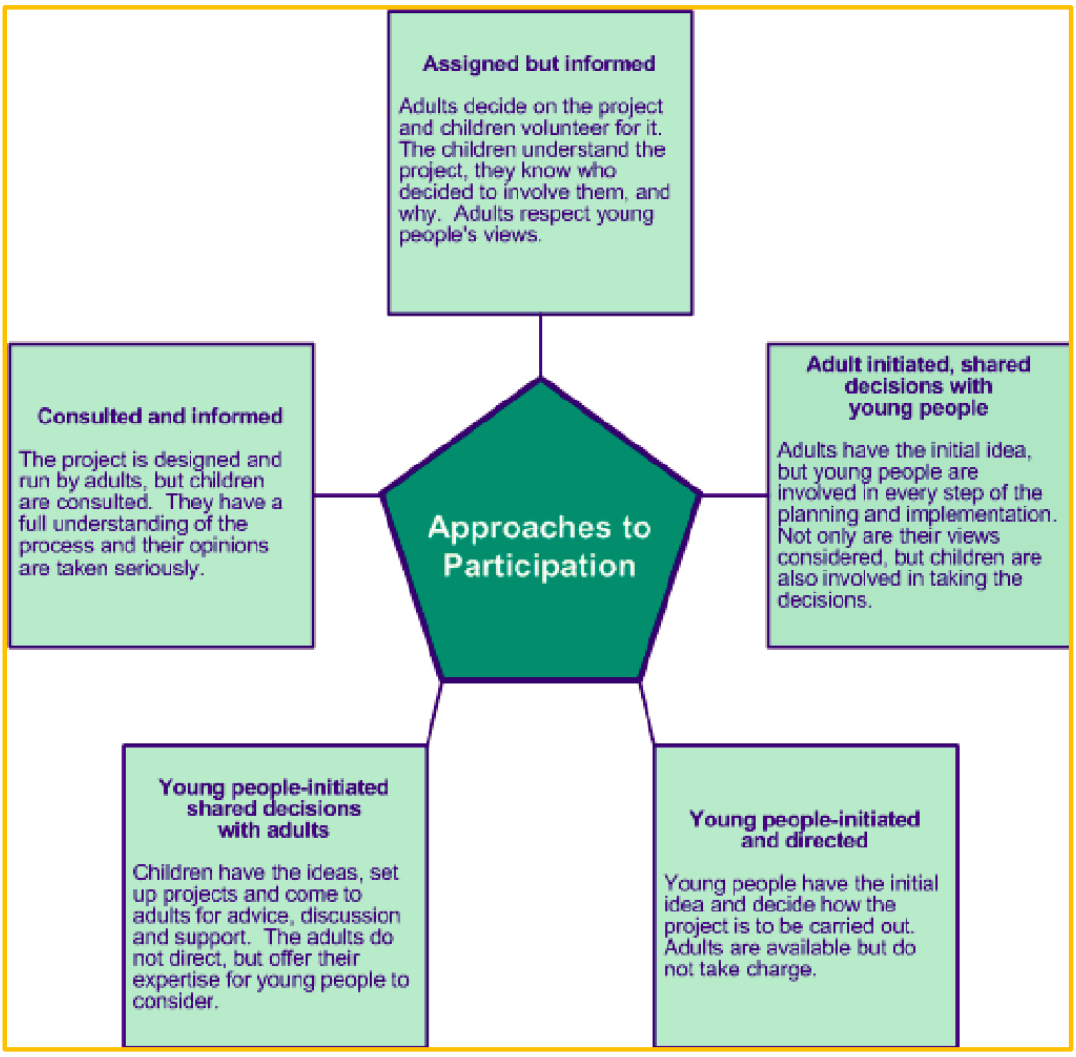


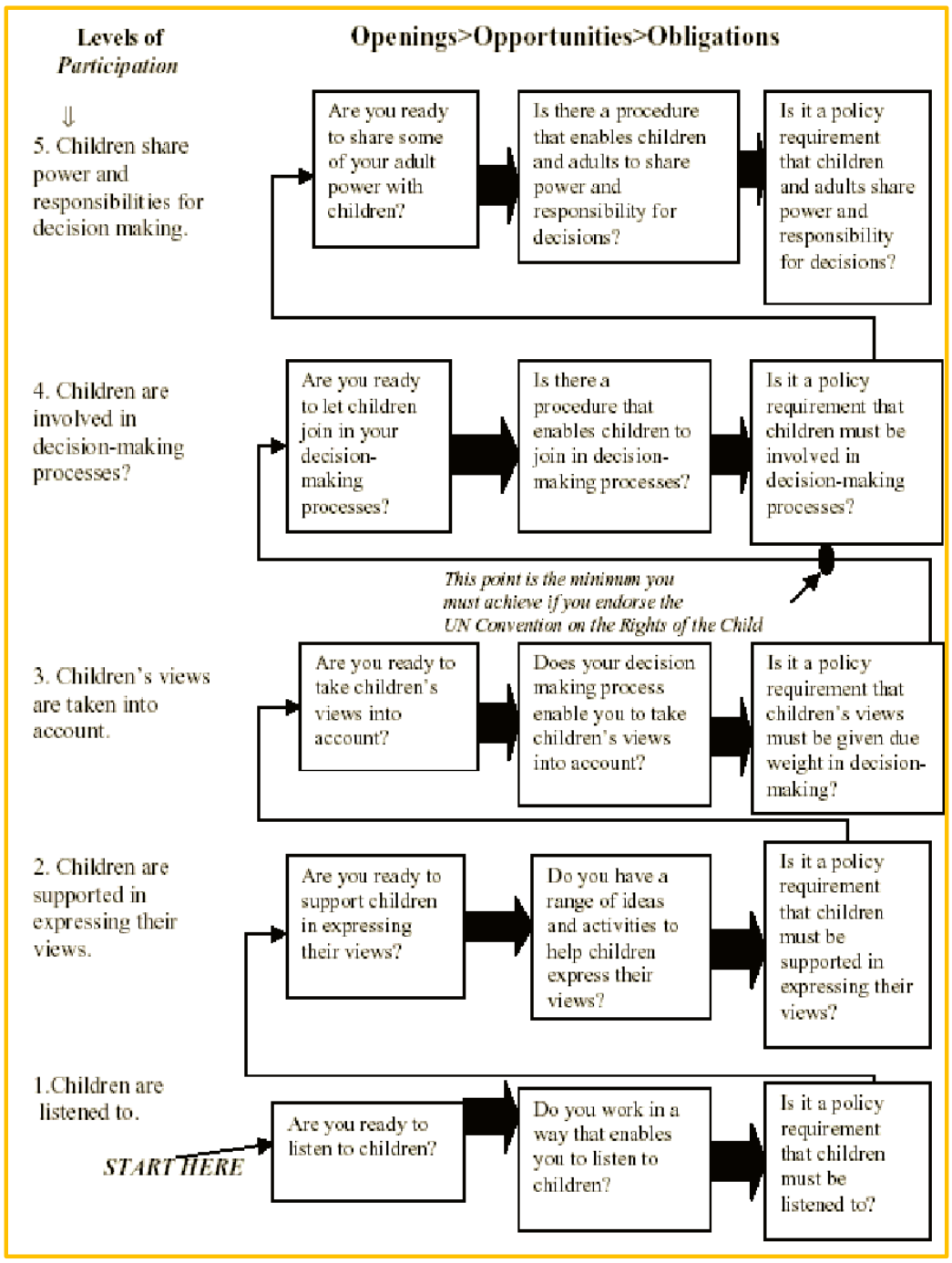
Figure 1: The ladder of participation. (Taken from 'The right to play and children's participation' by Roger Hart, in The Article 31 Action Pack, published by PLAY · TRAIN, 1995).

Of course, the aim of this toolkit is to help organizations avoid completely rungs 1 through 3 and ideally move to rungs 5 through 8, as feasible and appropriate. Hart's ladder of participation casts a long shadow over the field of youth engagement, but there are other models that have been proposed. In 1997, Phil Treseder put forward an alternative to Hart which did not present youth engagement as a progression of stages or types, but rather distinct approaches to a common goal.

Treseder's Approaches to Youth Engagement

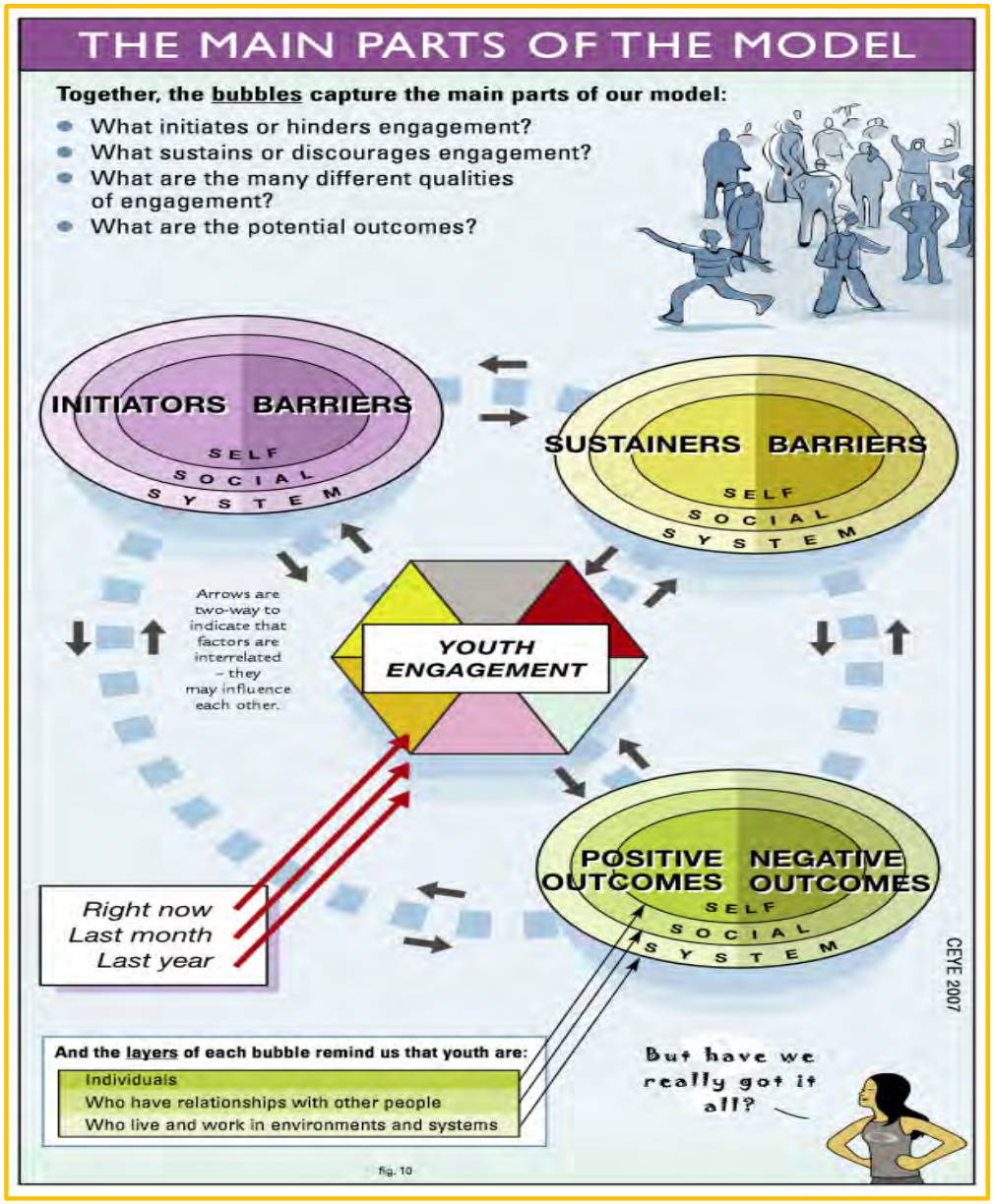


Then, in 2001, Henry Shier revived the idea of progression, as he outlined five levels of participation and identified three questions within each level to help practitioners discover where their current practice fits and to help determine the next step in advancing youth participation.



Conceptual Model of Youth Engagement

With the explosion of research in the early 21st century and the devotion of entire organizations to the advancement of youth engagement, we now see models related more directly to ***how*** to engage youth in meaningful participation. Primary among these is the Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement's Conceptual Model of Youth Engagement.



2.9 A NOTE ABOUT "REPRESENTATION"

Sometimes, particularly when we are seeking input in planning, governance, and policy, we ask individual young people to "represent" youth as a group. At first glance, this may seem similar or parallel to our efforts to ensure sectoral representation of other groups, such as seniors, Indigenous groups, business, non-profit, and government, or those in certain fields such as mental health, healthcare, substance use, and homelessness. Asking for youth representatives seems, on one level, an affirmation of voice.

However, we must tread carefully and ask two important questions when it comes to youth representation:

1. Is it possible?

Young people, defined by age, are an enormously diverse group of individuals. Imagine someone asking you to represent the 10-year demographic into which you fit. Could you do it with confidence?

We should not believe that the viewpoints of one, two, three, or even twenty youth can really encapsulate the voice of an entire generation or guarantee effective and relevant program / service design or planning processes.

2. Is it fair?

Asking a young person to broadly represent youth can be an overwhelming burden that brings pressure. For this reason, many youth will resist the role of representative. Asking a young person to serve as a representative, either of youth in general or of a specific segment of youth (such as a youth experiencing homelessness), may be damaging in that it defines that young person not primarily as an individual, but in terms of his or her membership in a group. It may also define a young person by his or her deficits or disadvantages, when we really need to shift to a strengths or assets-based perspective. This may lead to tokenism and not being respectful or authentic (see *** Principles of Youth Engagement).

Youth can represent other youth, but we must value those we engage first as individuals, and secondarily as members of a group. We can also train young people in constituency building, giving them the tools, skills, and encouragement to gather input from and survey their peers. In fact, they may do a much better job of this than non-peers, in terms of relating to those they're surveying, utilizing 21st-century tools such as social media, and in interpreting the results of their research.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Engaging with Children and Young People

- Mary Kellet of the Open University provides some theoretical background and discussion of ethics of youth engagement
- http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=ccyp_pubs

From Participation to Engagement: A Review of Conceptual Models for Developing Youth Engagement Strategies

- A comprehensive description of types and models of youth engagement, from Our Kids Network
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/html5/

Guidelines for Youth Engagement: An Environmental Scan of Youth Engagement Policies in Canada and Internationally

- A comprehensive look at youth engagement policies and practices,
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/html5/

Continuum of Youth Engagement

- An in-depth look at different types of youth engagement, by Our Kids Network
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_OKN continuum of youth engagement.pdf

Youth Engagement Literature Review

- The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health's literature review on youth engagement
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/JCSH_Lit_Review.pdf

Town of Halton Hills: Corporate Youth Engagement Strategy

- Example of a municipal youth engagement strategy
- http://haltonhills.ca/calendars/2014/R-2014-0022.pdf

3. PREPARING TO ENGAGE YOUTH

This section is designed to prepare organizations and other groups to engage youth meaningfully. The assessment tools can also help groups that are currently doing youth engagement work to clarify their purpose and evaluate their effectiveness.

You may also want to bring youth in at this preparation stage. “Engage early” is one of the key tips from many successful engagers. If you do not have existing youth engaged in your organization, it may be difficult and ineffective to bring new youth in just to assess your organizational readiness. One of the themes of this toolkit is engaging youth as soon as you begin planning.

The tools in this section should be used collaboratively by your planning group to assess the group’s readiness. Your group may want to review them as a group to ensure the full group understands the need for the tools and how to implement them locally. These tools are a good foundation of discussion among group or staff members, and between staff and management / directors.

3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following survey to gauge your readiness for youth engagement work. At the end you will tally up your scores. The final score indicates your capacity and readiness. Don't worry if you rate on the low end. You are reading this toolkit to gain knowledge and insight to improve your readiness.

Question	Yes	Somewhat	No
1. Has the organization implemented successful youth engagement practices or strategies in the past?			
2. Is there support for youth engagement at all levels of the organization? This may include Board of Directors, Management, Administration, Staff, Volunteers, and clients			
3. Does the organization have a participatory culture? For example, are many different stakeholder groups involved in decision-making and are junior staff and clients regularly consulted on or involved in planning.			
4. Does the organization have a generally youth friendly culture? This includes the physical space, staff, image, social media presence, and communications targeted specifically at youth.			
5. Does the organization have existing policies and procedures around involving youth?			
6. Are there existing opportunities for involving youth in planning, service delivery, research, events, communications, training, or governance?			
7. Does the organization have staff members or leaders who have proven ability to engage youth?			
8. Is the organization willing and able to devote financial resources to youth engagement?			
9. Is the organization willing and able to devote staff and / or time to youth engagement?			

10. Does the organization and its staff have flexible working structures? For example, can staff work flexible hours or are they limited to regular office hours? Can staff meet youth off-site?			
11. Does the organization have strong connections with school and other youth-serving institutions or organizations?			
12. Does the organization regularly collaborate in planning and decision-making with a diversity of people or stakeholders?			
13. Has the organization recognized and adopted anti-oppressive practices, either formally or informally?			
14. Has the organization received direct feedback from youth regarding their operations, services, programs, or reputation?			
15. Does the organization generally have a positive workplace culture and healthy relationships among staff, managers, volunteers and directors?			

Scoring the Questionnaire

Give yourself 2 points for every “yes” answer, 1 point for every “somewhat” answer, and 0 points for every “no” answer.

The following scale will give you a rough approximation of your state of readiness:

25-30 points	your organization is well-poised to engage youth successfully using any available method
15-25 points	your organization can engage youth successfully but must take steps to enhance the organization’s readiness; some methods of youth engagement may be out of reach
5-15 points	your organization may successfully engage youth on time-limited projects or non-essential ways and should work actively to enhance organizational readiness for deeper youth engagement practices
0-5 points	your organization should consider waiting to develop youth engagement strategies and activities at a later time

Recommendations Based on the Organizational Readiness Questionnaire

The following recommendations follow the outline of questions you have just completed. Please read the recommendations that correspond with your answer to each question. Please remember that even if you already have positive youth engagement practices you need to make continual efforts to ensure you are following the core principles of positive youth engagement. Don't get complacent because of success. As adult allies of youth we must live youth engagement on a daily basis.

1. Has the organization implemented successful youth engagement practices or strategies in the past?

YES: Review these past practices and strategies. What made them successful? Which elements should be replicated or repeated in future efforts? What challenges might have been avoided? What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them? You may be able to leverage these successes, and involve some of the same people (staff and youth), to devise your next activity, project, or strategy.

SOMEWHAT: Review these past practices and strategies. Which elements should be replicated or repeated in future efforts? What challenges might have been avoided? What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them? Consider these past efforts in light of the other organizational readiness questions to determine how to proceed in future efforts.

NO: Consider short-term engagement strategies such as projects and events, which can help serve as the foundation for longer-term, broader-scope strategies in the future.

2. Is there support for youth engagement at all levels of the organization?

YES: Bravo! All options are open.

SOMEWHAT: Consider identifying areas where more support is needed and providing opportunities for education and discussion around youth engagement. Leverage the success of youth engagement activities to generate more support, and consider "phased engagement," explained in the "Choosing Methods" part of this section below.

NO: You will need to actively garner support at all levels of your organization or steering committee in order to sustain a youth engagement strategy. You may still conduct project-based youth engagement activities but are best to avoid planning, governance, policy, and decision-making activities. You may want to consult with youth about your organization and use this input as leverage for change and support.

3. Does the organization have a participatory culture?

YES: Wonderful. An existing culture of participation is a good foundation for all types of youth engagement activities.

SOMEWHAT: You may have to do some work to strengthen the culture of participation. Engaging youth will help you do that.

NO: There may be some challenges to your youth engagement strategy, as people in the organization must understand the value of youth participation. Engaging youth in governance and high-level decision-making may be unwise until the culture has become more participatory overall.

4. Does the organization have a generally youth friendly culture?

YES: Fantastic. But you should check to be sure that this perception is shared by the youth themselves. With a youth friendly organization, you will have an easier time recruiting and retaining young people.

SOMEWHAT: Identify which aspects of the organization could or must become more youth friendly to succeed at your youth engagement ideas. Ask young people themselves how you might go about this.

NO: Engaging youth in organizational processes may be difficult. Consider project-based work or events which don't require youth work closely in your organization's structures. Youth engagement activities, done well, can help your organization become more youth friendly. Create a plan to actively make your organization more youth friendly.

5. Does the organization have existing policies and procedures around involving youth?

YES: Great. You may want to review these periodically and ensure they are keeping up with emerging and promising practices.

SOMEWHAT: Consider strengthening such policies and procedures. Encourage or facilitate discussion of youth engagement at all levels of the organization, from staff and volunteers to Board.

NO: Educate yourself and those in your group before engaging youth. Consider safety and ethics carefully before creating your youth engagement strategy, and look to Section 5 – Tools and Resources of this toolkit to find some forms and other documents that help with the legal and ethical sides of youth engagement.

6. Are there existing opportunities for involving youth in planning, service delivery, research, events, communications, training, or governance?

YES: Wonderful. Your job now is to determine how best to engage and support youth in those opportunities.

SOMEWHAT: Consider how existing opportunities match with your goals of youth engagement. You may want to expand the breadth of opportunities to provide greater choice for youth who wish to be engaged.

NO: You will need to create a variety of opportunities for involving youth and may want to begin your youth engagement strategy with project-based work.

7. Does the organization have staff members, other members, or leaders who have proven ability to engage youth?

YES: Fantastic. Now you need to ensure that these individuals are actively involved in planning your youth engagement strategy, work directly with the youth themselves, or share their experience and knowledge to those who are working directly with young people, through training and mentoring.

SOMEWHAT: Make sure that these people take a central place in your youth engagement strategy. You will need to leverage this experience as well as you can. Also consider youth engagement training opportunities and partnering with a youth-serving organization to learn more about youth engagement.

NO: You will need to learn more about youth engagement and seek youth-serving partners to help guide the development and implementation of your youth engagement strategy. Identify people in your group who you think have the potential to be key engagers, or bring new people in who have proven engagement ability.

8. Is the organization willing and able to devote financial resources to youth engagement?

YES: Wonderful.

SOMEWHAT: Consider engagement methods that do not require a great deal of financial resources, or seek out funding opportunities specifically for youth engagement or youth projects.

NO: You should seek funding specifically for your youth engagement activities, but you should continually advocate within your group for allocation of some resources to youth engagement.

9. Is the organization willing and able to devote staff and / or time to youth engagement?

YES: Fantastic. Once you outline your strategy or activities, you may want to ensure that youth engagement is written into the job descriptions of those working with youth or documenting the allocation of time to youth engagement activities.

SOMEWHAT: You will need to plan carefully and be efficient to succeed in youth engagement, and you may consider seeking funding for youth engagement positions or volunteers.

NO: It will be a great challenge to succeed at any youth engagement activities without devoting time.

10. Does the organization and its staff have flexible working structures?

YES: Great. You will have greater success in sustaining youth engagement because you can adapt to changing needs and desires that youth engagement requires (e.g. hosting groups after school hours).

SOMEWHAT: You should plan your youth engagement activities carefully and be upfront with the youth about the working structures they are dealing with. Consider improving flexibility for those in the group conducting youth engagement.

NO: You can still engage youth, but your activities might best involve youth who have experience volunteering in situations with rigid working structures and understand the expectations of such organizations. If you want to engage youth on their own terms, you will need to find ways to adapt your working structures.

11. Does the organization have strong connections with school and other youth-serving institutions or organizations?

YES: Wonderful. You should use these connections as you plan and carry out your youth engagement activities.

SOMEWHAT: Develop strategies to strengthen existing relationships and finding new ones. Youth engagement activities can, in fact, help you do this.

NO: Before engaging youth it would be wise to develop partnerships or working relationships with schools and other youth-serving organizations. Especially if your organization is new to the entire idea of youth engagement, you will benefit greatly from having these partners.

12. Does the organization regularly collaborate in planning and decision-making with a diversity of people or stakeholders?

YES: Great. You may wish to engage youth on some level in your planning, decision-making, and governance processes.

SOMEWHAT: Engaging youth in planning, decision-making, and governance may be a challenge. Proceed carefully and ensure that you have the right people and supports in place to ensure safety and meaningful participation.

NO: You may want to avoid engaging youth in planning and decision-making activities and instead focus on project, consultation, and event-based activities until your group has more experience with broad stakeholder engagement or is more familiar with youth engagement practices.

13. Has the organization recognized and adopted anti-oppressive practices, either formally or informally?

YES: Bravo. You will need to work to ensure that your anti-oppression framework is respected by staff, managers, volunteers, and program participants.

SOMEWHAT: Consider further training and education in anti-oppression theory and practice for everyone connected to your work. Everyone needs to understand the importance of this work and agree to work from an anti-oppression perspective.

NO: Educate people throughout the organization in anti-oppression theory and practice to ensure that youth engagement strategies and activities can follow the core principles of youth engagement. You should work towards adopting anti-oppression practices formally and having all staff, managers and volunteers trained to ensure adoption of the policies and procedures.

14. Has the organization received direct feedback from youth regarding their operations, services, programs, or reputation?

YES: Fantastic. Act upon this feedback and let it inform changes to your youth engagement strategies. Communicate this feedback throughout the organization and back to the youth who shared their feedback. This will help build trust with youth as they will see implementation of their feedback.

SOMEWHAT: If you have youth engaged on some level, consider asking for more feedback. You may also have youth themselves survey their peers about your organization and its programs and services.

NO: Collect feedback from youth before devising your youth engagement strategy. You may gather feedback informally, or work with youth to survey their peers about your organization. This is an example of a youth engagement project discussed earlier in this section.

15. Does the organization generally have a positive workplace culture and healthy relationships among staff, managers, volunteers, and directors?

YES: Great! This will make it a more welcoming and positive place for engaged youth.

SOMEWHAT: When planning youth engagement activities, carefully ensure that you are fostering healthy relationships and that you are taking the safety of young people into consideration when involving them in organizational structures.

NO: Avoid bringing youth into potential harmful organizational structures. Focus your efforts on developing a positive workplace culture and healthy relationships among staff, managers, volunteers, and directors.

3.2 IDENTIFYING YOUR ASSETS

Now you will identify and list the assets that your organization or group brings to its youth engagement activities. Understanding what you have to devote to your strategy will help you select methods that will be feasible. If your group is comprised of representative of several different organizations, then a discussion of assets that each can contribute will help define your scope.

Human Resources
"Key Engagers" (people in the organization who have proven ability to engage youth)
Dedicated Staff and Volunteers (people for whom youth engagement is part of their job description / may or may not be key engagers)
Tangible Resources
Dedicated funds (amount of money currently available to support youth engagement, either as a standalone budget or parts of other budgets)
Other tangible resources (office supplies and technology that can be used in youth engagement activities)

Space (safe and suitable space that can be used by youth engagement activities)

Time

Staff, Volunteers, and Management (how much time, outside of regular youth programming and service, can people devote to engagement training and youth engagement overall? May be itemized by person or estimated, on a per week or per month basis)

Directors (if applicable; how much time can directors devote to learning about and providing input on youth engagement)

Skills and Knowledge

Training (what training or professional development opportunities regarding youth and youth engagement practices have been provided in the past year?)

Resources (what resources (text, online, other) does the group have access to that relate to youth engagement?)

Influence and Connection

Partner organizations (what youth-serving institutions, including schools, and organizations does your group have positive partnerships with?)

Funders (what funders do you have that support youth engagement practices?)

If you find your group lacking in any of these areas, you may still be able to engage youth successfully, but you should consider developing your assets further in order to grow your engagement strategy.

3.3 IDENTIFYING YOUR REASONS FOR ENGAGING YOUTH

At this point, you should consider why you are engaging youth. Below are the benefits previously listed in Section 2. The benefits are divided between those to individuals (youth and adult allies) and those to the organization (programs/services and overall organization). From each area – individual and organizational – choose the five benefits that you would primarily like to see through your youth engagement strategy. Feel free to include benefits that do not appear in these lists.

Benefits to Individuals

Youth	Adult Allies
– Personal development – Building of skills, knowledge, and capacity – Reduction in negative risk behaviours – Positive academic outcomes and lower failure rates – A sense of connectedness to school community – Increased civic engagement – Better relationships and interpersonal skills – Larger social networks – Learning from adults about community and resources	– Overcoming youth stereotypes – Greater energy, passion, and optimism – Greater sense of collective purpose and commitment to organization – New perspectives on decision-making – Enhanced connection with others in organization

Benefits to Organization

Program / Services	Organization
– More responsive to youth needs – Better program development – Increased use / access of services – Improved staff abilities to serve youth – Increased program evaluation – Better information sharing with youth	– Improved relevance and effectiveness of decisions – Improved efficiency – Culture of inclusion – Identification of systematic inequalities – Greater influence on policy-makers outside the organization – Better connections between decision-making and programming – Greater innovation – Better focus on diversity – Better outreach and advocacy – Greater clarity in mission and vision – Greater credibility with funders

Looking at the list of benefits, discuss and decide which benefits your youth engagement strategy will emphasize:

5 Individual Benefits we are striving for:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

5 Organizational Benefits we are Striving For

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND TOOLS TO EVALUATE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Youth Engagement Survey Map

- A tool for adults and youth to reflect on and describe their experiences in youth-adult partnerships.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools01.php

Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit

- An open-ended method of gathering participants' thoughts about their engagement experience.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools03.php

Youth Engagement Surveys and Tools

- A variety of surveys and tools for assessing organizational culture, youth participant experiences, youth-adult partnerships, and engagement practices.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools00.php

Workshop Evaluation – Youth Participant

- A survey for youth participants to complete after a workshop
- http://archives.studentscommission.ca/blueprint/workshop04_e.php

Youth Meeting Evaluation – Participants

- A tool for collecting feedback on youth's experiences at a meeting

- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/resources/mtg_evalyouth_paper.pdf

Indicator Framework: Initiating Youth Engagement

- A simple framework for assessing an organization's initial youth engagement strategies / approaches
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Init.pdf

Assessment Tool: Initiating Youth Engagement

- An excellent starting point for organizations wishing to initiate a youth engagement strategy
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Init.pdf

Indicator Framework: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement

- A framework for assessing an organization's ongoing youth engagement strategies and approaches based on 8 key criteria
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Qualities.pdf

Assessment Tool: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement

- An excellent and comprehensive assessment tool for discussion and evaluation an organization's youth engagement practices around 8 key criteria
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Qualities.pdf

Indicator Framework: Sustaining Youth Engagement

- A simple framework for assessing an organization's ongoing youth engagement strategies / approaches
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Sus.pdf

Assessment Tool: Sustaining Youth Engagement

- A great tool for evaluating an organization's ongoing youth engagement practices
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Sus.pdf

Organizational Assessment Checklist

- A great tool for assessing your organization's assets and readiness for youth engagement
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_Organizational%20readiness%20checklist.pdf

3.4 DEVELOPING A YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Now that you have done some of the background work, you are ready to strategize. In this section, you will make decisions in several areas:

- 3.4.1 Methods of engagement
- 3.4.2 Numbers and recruiting criteria
- 3.4.3 Roles and responsibilities
- 3.4.4 Garnering support
- 3.4.5 Choosing initial engagement activities

3.4.1 Methods of Engagement

There are many different ***ways*** of engaging youth. Gerison Lansdown (2001) identifies three categories of methods:

a) consultative processes (adult-initiated / managed)
b) participative initiatives (adult-initiated / collaborative)
c) processes promoting self-advocacy (controlled by youth / adults as facilitators)

The methods of engagement you choose will depend on several factors. These include:

- Your overall purpose
- The desired benefits, to youth and to your organization
- How the methods match the youth you hope to engage
- What the organization can support
- Your organization readiness, as revealed through the questionnaire in this section

Generally speaking, the greater your organizational readiness the deeper within your organization you may be able to successfully engage youth.

Key Factors When Choosing Methods of Engagement

1. Participation
2. Early engagement
3. Structure
4. Time and Duration
5. Partnership
6. Gateway Activities / Phased Engagement

Participation: purely consultative processes may involve much more “take” than “give;” be careful not to adopt an approach based too strongly on what you want to get from youth; ensure that engagement is participatory and relationship-based.

Early engagement: the most successful youth engagement activities are those in which youth were involved early in the process and had a hand in designing and planning the activities.

Structure: the key to many youth engagement activities is structure and clear purpose.

Time & Duration: it can be difficult to recruit new youth for open-ended processes; consider time-limited activities with room for the development of open-ended activities when youth identify the desire; expecting youth to commit for long periods of time will turn young people off; in our survey of adolescent youth, the average length of time respondents would be willing to be on a youth committee was just three months.

Partnership: linking your youth engagement activities with those of another organization, especially a school, can enhance your success.

Gateway Activities / Phased Engagement: you don’t have to start by involving youth deep within your organization; you can start with project-based, time-limited activities to begin engaging youth, then develop your ongoing strategy with the youth as you identify youth leaders and refine your engagement practices; you may also parcel off parts of a larger planning or implementation process and, rather than engaging youth in planning and governance, create projects attached to those larger processes and functions.

Specific Methods of Youth Engagement	
Initiating a youth project	– Awareness raising – Research – Program evaluation – Program design – Art or performance – Communications planning – Community mapping – Celebrations – Fundraising
Organizing a youth event	– Fundraising (for another youth initiative) – Raising awareness – Publicizing successes, plans, or services – Youth networking – Youth empowerment and voice – Input gathering – Celebrations
Consulting with youth	– Interviews – Focus groups – Surveys (oral, paper, online) – Sharing circles – Invitation of multimedia input
Inviting youth to serve on an existing committee, board, or council	– Advisory groups – Research groups – Policy-making committees – Governance and oversight – Fundraising and philanthropy – Organization and planning
Initiating the formation of a new youth group	– Providing input or advice into ongoing processes – Contributing to planning or oversight – Skill development – Education and public awareness – Advocacy and promotion of social justice – Fundraising – Planning

For tips and advice on these methods of engagement, please see **Section 4 – Tips and Best Practices, 4.20 to 4.24.**

3.4.2 Numbers and Recruiting Criteria

When you have an idea of what methods you will use to engage youth, or if you want to leave it open and engage some youth first who will work in partnership to devise your strategy, you need to decide roughly how many young people you will engage and develop some criteria for selection or recruiting.

Number: You don't need an exact number, but it is a good idea to have a rough idea of how many youth you will be looking to engage. Remember that smaller numbers can, in general, be easier to function with than larger numbers. Larger numbers require more support and make decision-making processes more complex. Even if you are only looking to have youth serve on an existing committee, it is best to consider at least two young people. Serving as a single youth, whether it's on a committee, project, or event planning, can be isolating and intimidating.

Criteria: You should create a preliminary list of criteria for your recruiting and selection process. These criteria may change, and you may aim for diversity by having different youth satisfy different criteria. Possible criteria include:

- Experience in volunteer or community development work
- Lived experience of the issues your organization addresses
- Energy and enthusiasm
- Academic accomplishment
- Involvement in extracurricular activities
- The need or desire for engagement and personal development
- Organizational, research, and communication skills
- Established relationship with adult allies in your group
- Personal and professional recommendations
- Age
- Commitment to change (personal or social)
- Understanding or the organization and the systems in which it works
- Understanding of ground-level realities relating to the issues your organization addresses
- Other…

When deciding on criteria, you should take into account your organizational readiness assessment. You should tailor your criteria to the level of support that you can provide to the youth. You should also understand that even high-achieving, academically successful, and experienced youth will need ongoing support. Your criteria should also take into account the benefits you listed earlier. For example, if the benefits you hope to provide are personal development and skill-building, you may want to target youth who do not already have those opportunities and skills.

3.4.3 Roles and Responsibilities

While roles and responsibilities may evolve throughout the course of your youth engagement activities, it is wise to lay out an initial working list. Consider:

- What will specific people do?
- What will specific people contribute in terms of time and resources?
- What will the organization contribute in terms of resources?

Roles	Responsibilities
Youth	
Adult allies / key engagers	
Organization	
Partners / community	

3.4.4 Garnering Support

Once you have devised your youth engagement strategy, it is important to garner support for your efforts, both within your organization and outside. Key questions to consider include:

- Who within the organization needs to support or be aware of your efforts?
- Who (individuals and organizations) outside your organization need to support or be aware of your efforts?
- How will you garner support and raise awareness of your efforts?

Who	How
Within the organization	
Outside the organization	

3.4.5 Choosing Initial Engagement Activities

Now you will generate an initial list of activities involved in your youth engagement strategy. You do not need to plan everything at this stage. Indeed, it is a good idea to involve youth in the planning of activities. But generating an initial list will help you garner support and communicate your aims within your organization, to youth, and outside your organization.

You may wish to look through the following checklist and match some of your activities to these ideas. Positive youth engagement activities are those that...

- Teach youth new skills and knowledge
- Help youth achieve their life goals
- Include things that the youth are passionate about
- Provide a positive social network
- Give youth experience in decision-making
- Allow youth to see results
- Allow youth to solve problems
- Provide opportunities for leadership
- Provide opportunities to reflect on identity
- Develop social awareness
- Celebrate achievable goals
- Build healthy relationships among youth and between adult allies and youth

Initial Activities List

4. TIPS and BEST PRACTICES

In this section, you will find practical advice on different aspects of youth engagement. The topics are roughly organized from early to later in the engagement process. You may read through all the topics, or select what interests you from the list below. In most sections, there are links to further tools and resources that may be useful.

Initial Considerations	4.1	Relating to Youth
	4.2	Diversity
Methods and Logistics	4.3	Recruiting
	4.4	Incentives
	4.5	Timelines and Scheduling
	4.6	Training and Expectations
	4.7	Places, Spaces, and Transportation
	4.8	Conducting Meetings
	4.9	Youth-Friendly Activities
	4.10	Communicating
	4.11	Youth-Friendly Materials
	4.12	Social Media
Supporting Success	4.13	Supporting Youth
	4.14	Engaging Youth with Lived Experience
	4.15	Engaging Different Age Groups
	4.16	Conflict Resolution
	4.17	Sustaining Engagement
Outcomes and Exits	4.18	Exits
	4.19	Publicizing, Celebrating, and Reporting Back
Specific Methods of Engagement	4.20	Initiating a Youth Project
	4.21	Organizing a Youth Event
	4.22	Consulting with Youth
	4.23	Inviting youth to Sit on a Committee or Board
	4.24	Forming a New Youth Group

4.1 RELATING TO YOUTH

Key Ideas:

- Check your assumptions at the door
- Empathize
- Be yourself
- Show interest
- Understand and respect
- Have fun

It may seem natural, or common, for people in any generation to look at the following one and shake their heads in disbelief or scratch their heads in confusion. Generation gaps sometimes feel more like canyons. Or at least they're made out to be that way. But so many of the apparent differences are superficial, not fundamental. And in the North America of today, perceptions of difference are exacerbated by increasing generational isolation. No longer do children and their grandparents live under one roof. They don't even congregate in the same public spaces. They are each to their own, which causes confusion, ignorance, and misunderstanding.

Of course, you may be lucky, or wise, enough to have regular intergenerational contact. If so, bravo. And some of what you read in this little section might seem common sense. In some ways, it is. But relating to youth is not something everyone feels they can do well.

Check your assumptions at the door: There is no shortage of negative stereotypes of youth. They're apathetic, they're entitled, they're lazy, and they lack follow-through. And people can easily find examples that supposedly prove the stereotypes are true. But if you're dealing in such assumptions, you're headed for trouble. Treat each young person as an interesting and meaningful individual.

Empathize: Think back to when you were 14, or 18, or 22. What was important to you? What were your frustrations? Your preoccupations? Your ambitions? How did you spend your time? How did you feel when your parents, or other adults, didn't take you seriously or didn't listen in the first place? It's funny that many people don't, in retrospect, take ***themselves as youth*** seriously. They are dismissive of their own past actions and beliefs. But the trials and joys of youth are ***real***. Don't forget what it was like. Respect your own youth, and you'll be able to empathize with others.

Be yourself: You might have no problem being yourself, and your natural self might connect well with youth. But some people think they need to act youthful themselves, change their behaviour, the way they dress, the language they use, so that it's more ***youthful***. Don't kid yourself, or others. Be who you are, because that's authentic, and authenticity is rule #1. Young people won't mistake you for a peer if you're not. And they may not be looking for another peer. They may be looking for the real you. Being yourself also means sharing a bit. Don't be a clinician. Open up. Tell a story. Admit to your faults and fears. You still need to keep healthy boundaries in mind, but if you ask a bunch of young people to be real and share their life stories, you'd better be willing to do some of the same.

Show interest: Many young people (of every generation) feel like adults don't listen to them. The reason is obvious: they don't. Many systems, social structures, and institutions operate without formal mechanisms of youth input, and the people who work in those systems, structures, and institutions may take a paternalistic attitude toward youth. So be different. Listen. Don't judge. Ask questions. And listen some more. Approach dealing with youth as a learning opportunity, not just a teaching opportunity. You also need to remember that youth engagement hinges on connecting with youth interests. If you can't relate what you're trying to do to something that has meaning for the youth, the engagement won't stick.

Understand and Respect: Many young people have busy lives and competing priorities. Many of those priorities might trump whatever you're trying to do with them. If they don't make it to a meeting, be understanding. If they have to drop out of your activities altogether, assume they have good reasons. You also need to understand that as a young person it can be very difficult to go against the status quo. And when young people react negatively to direction, advice, or even encouragement or praise, realize that such reactions may in fact be ***rational***, based on their previous negative experiences. Understanding and respecting also means leading and mentoring, rather than punishing and preaching.

Have fun: Doing serious work and having fun are not mutually exclusive activities. If you spend most of your time thinking and talking about timelines, outcomes, project inputs, and other such important but not inherently compelling aspects of your youth engagement activities, you might start losing people. At the end of the day, it's about people having fun doing good work with other people.

4.2 DIVERSITY

Key Groups of Youth

- Indigenous youth
- Youth with special needs
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Two-Spirited youth
- Newcomers
- Young parents
- Youth experiencing homelessness

If you completed Section 3 - Preparing to Engage Youth, you may have given some initial thought to the type of youth you might engage, and you may have a list of criteria that will guide your youth recruiting process. However, the topic of diversity and inclusivity deserves special mention here. Not only should you strive to engage a diverse population of young people, but you must also ensure, on a practical level, that your practices are inclusive. That is, what you do and how you do it must ensure the safety, comfort, and active participation of all.

In some cases, you may find that the required approaches to different groups are so different that you wish to engage them separately. For example, if you are doing a consultation to find out what young homeless people in your community feel are the most pressing issues, you may wish to organize separate focus groups for Indigenous youth and LGBTQ2S youth. This may help ensure a suitable degree of safety and comfort for people to talk about opinions and experiences that are sensitive, emotionally charged, and possibly traumatic. At the same time, you may have a group of youth organizing this consultation that is inclusive of all groups.

While diversity and inclusivity are important, you must tread carefully. Efforts toward diversity should be authentic and respectful, and you should avoid shallow use of a group's culture, symbols, and language. Also keep in mind that many people do not want to be identified primarily by their membership in a specific group. Foregrounding one particular aspect of their identity in your dealings with them can be disrespectful and/or oppressive, even when well-intentioned. Some of the best efforts at inclusivity are inclusive without advertising diversity.

The single-greatest way to ensure diversity and inclusivity is to do so at the planning and organizing level. For example, if you are engaged youth in the creation of a homelessness action plan, and you have identified Indigenous youth, youth in government care, and LGBTQ2S youth as representing a significant proportion of the homeless youth population (as they truly are), then ensure representation of these groups at the planning level!

Indigenous youth: As you engage Indigenous youth, it is absolutely necessary to understand and acknowledge history (including the process of truth and reconciliation) and culture, including the differences between different Indigenous groups (First Nations, Inuit, Metis, and urban Indigenous peoples, and different groups and interests within each). You should also consider and acknowledge traditional land and territory when you plan and conduct

meetings and events. When engaging Indigenous youth, consider involving an Indigenous organization and/or elders (if you do not have them already at your planning table). It is also important to understand that Indigenous peoples have and want varying degrees of connection and knowledge of traditional culture.

Youth with special needs: it is very difficult to talk about youth with special needs as a group, since their needs may be so different, and because like everyone else they deserve to be treated as individuals. Understand that many youth with special needs have been defined and treated differently based on their special need, often framed as a deficit. Be sure to acknowledge strengths while accommodating the physical, mental, or emotional environment for the individuals with special needs that you are engaging.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Two-Spirited youth: The LGBTQ2S community is part of a fluid spectrum of gender and sexuality, and we must acknowledge and honour individuals as they identify themselves, not according to where we assume they fit into traditional roles or binary conceptions of sexuality and gender. This includes using gender pronouns that the youth identify with, providing gender neutral or gender inclusive restrooms when and where possible, and developing codes of conduct and guidelines that ensure tolerance and respect. Please refer to the LGBTQ2S Toolkit from Eva's Initiatives for more guidance around these issues.

Newcomers: Newcomer youth includes, but is not limited to, immigrants and refugees, many of whom have come to Canada with their families. Canada is a proudly multicultural society, and youth engagement practices should take this into account. Understand that newcomer youth may have different pressures and responsibilities than other youth. Engagement practices should acknowledge that newcomer youth may be learning to navigate new or unfamiliar systems, processes, social structures, and political landscapes. Take into consideration language and cultural differences (including holidays and diet).

Young parents: Because of the additional responsibilities and time constraints, young parents often lack opportunities for engagement; however, they should not be overlooked as they may have a lot to contribute. While young parents may have challenges that other youth do not, they may also have greater maturity and sense of responsibility. When engaging young parents, you may have to take into account special scheduling considerations and other constraints. You may want to provide additional types of support – such as childcare – for young parents who wish to engage.

Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Youth experiencing homelessness may be facing a variety of barriers not only to engagement but to general well-being. They may have higher levels of problematic substance use, mental illness, and trauma. Those who are street-entrenched may have difficulties adapting to mainstream norms of decision-making, conflict resolution, and collaboration. That said, youth experiencing homelessness may demonstrate amazing resilience in the face of difficulty. When engaging these youth, consider that their living circumstances may change frequently, even daily, and that they may be trying to meet basic needs before fulfilling other responsibilities. Consider helping them meet those needs to facilitate their engagement and providing additional support or mentoring to help them work constructively within your structures and processes.

4.3 RECRUITING

Key Ideas:

- Be interesting
- Use partnerships
- Use informed recruitment
- Invite to learn more

Recruiting is the process of finding or identifying youth to be engaged. Below are some important considerations when recruiting as well as several common recruiting methods. Remember that engagement is all about relationship building, and that those relationships begin right from the first contact. The face you present during recruiting should be the authentic face that you maintain throughout your activities.

Be interesting: Young people get engaged with things that interest them, so be interesting. Show how the activities and opportunity intersect with different areas of interest. You're not advertising a job opportunity; you're trying to attract passionate people who are willing to donate their time and energy.

Use partnerships: If you completed Section 3 – Preparing to Engage Youth, you identified partners in your community that might help you engage youth. These partners can be very helpful when recruiting. They may have existing relationships with exactly the youth you wish to engage and they may be able to identify and recruit individuals for you.

Informed recruitment: Whatever method of recruitment you use, you need to provide enough information for people to decide whether they want to get involved. That includes:

- The sponsoring organization or group
- The purpose
- What people will actually do
- Basic requirements
- What people might get out of it
- Incentives
- Time commitment

Remember that different people may get engaged for different reasons, and so different benefits may appeal to different people. Also remember that if you ***don't*** provide enough information for people to make a decision, most will not go to the trouble of contacting you to learn more. So in some ways, you only get one shot at each individual.

Invite to learn more: Sometimes it's hard to give people a clear ideas of your activities on a poster, in an email, or in a five-minute conversation. In this case, you can begin with an information session; instead of advertising the engagement opportunity, you advertise the information session, where you can provide food, personalize things, provide more in-depth information, and really help people decide whether they want to get involved or not. Make sure it's a low-pressure session and don't force anyone to decide on the spot about whether they want to be involved. Still, be sure to follow up with participants and actively facilitate their involvement.

Key Recruiting Methods

1. Public callout
2. Targeted callout
3. Word of mouth
4. Recruiting specific individuals

You may choose to use one or several of the following methods in your recruiting efforts:

Public Callout: Advertise your opportunity broadly and solicit "applications" from all who are interested. Here are some key considerations for doing a public callout:

- Use social media, not just posters, though you may use both
- Explain your committee and what youth will do very clearly
- You may require expressions of interest by email, phone, or in person
- You may or may not require a resume
- Make sure you have enough time to go through expressions of interest to make the right choice

- Establish key selection criteria ahead of time

A public callout will typically elicit interest from youth who have a history of engagement, who pay attention to such recruiting efforts, or who are actively seeking ways of being engaged. If you are looking for youth who do not necessarily have a history of engagement in community work, you might best opt for other strategies.

Targeted Callout: A targeted callout uses some of the same tools as a public callout, but with a greater focus. If you're looking for youth with lived experience of homelessness, for example, you might put posters up in agencies where these youth are known to go. You may also post online on the sites of such agencies, or piggyback on the Facebook pages of groups or organizations that already engage the youth you are looking for.

With a targeted callout, it is a good idea to identify a point person at the school, agency, or organization who can help explain what you are doing and, perhaps, to encourage youth to become involved. Leveraging relationships with people who already engage youth is, more generally, a great way to engage youth.

Word of Mouth: Using your partnerships or, even better, youth themselves, you can spread the word about your opportunity through informal social networks. You might begin with key people like teachers or youth who are already engaged. Word of mouth can be supported by a handout or leaflet advertising the opportunity. Encouraging word of mouth is a good companion strategy to all the other methods.

Recruitment of Individuals: Instead of advertising with a callout, it may be more effective to target specific individuals who would be good candidates or who you think would benefit from the opportunity. Start by asking around your organization or network whether anyone knows or knows of specific youth who would be good candidates. You can broaden your search by approaching your community partners in schools, agencies, and other groups and asking them to recommend certain individuals. In any case, have adult allies with existing relationships with the youth make first contact. They are in a position to explain, encourage, answer questions, and develop trust.

If you are looking to engage youth with lived experience of homelessness, individual recruitment may be your best option. You will be able to wisely identify those individuals who are at a developmental stage that allows them to succeed or benefit. This engagement may be a wonderful opportunity for youth to give back to their community (assuming you provide the right support).

4.4 INCENTIVES

Basic types of incentives:

- Tangible
- Intangible

Incentives can be effective, but you shouldn't forget that the primary reason youth get involved in something is because they are interested, passionate, or keen to make a change in the world. In other words, it doesn't matter if you order pizza if all you do is eat it.

That said, the number one incentive, according to the youth we talked to, is food. This applies to ***all*** youth, regardless of socioeconomic status. Not only do youth like food, but eating together can help build relationships, and meal times are often when youth ***have time*** to serve on committees. It's also a good idea to allow youth to take home extra food that is left over from the meeting (and you can even provide containers to do so). If you can't incorporate a meal into gatherings (because meetings do not take place at mealtimes or because it is prohibitively expensive), you may consider offering just a snack.

Food is not the only incentive, however. There are many other benefits, both tangible and intangible, that you can offer to young people.

Tangible Benefits

A CEYE study found that financial incentives were a significant factor in young people becoming involved in projects or community processes. Indeed, a stipend or honorarium can be extremely useful for those who are unemployed, underemployed, or otherwise in a difficult financial position. Don't forget that volunteerism is a luxury, and one that many people simply can't afford.

If you do offer purely financial incentives, be sure to clearly define what the stipend is for. Is it for attending meetings? Do the youth receive it regardless of whether they show up? Track payments carefully, having people sign for the money they receive and remember that not every young person, especially those who are street-entrenched or homeless, has a bank account. For that reason, cash is best.

But beyond purely financial incentives, there are other tangible benefits that you may offer, including:

- Gift certificates or gift cards (at grocery stores, coffee shops, etc.)
- Transportation (you may give out bus tickets, bus passes, or offer to drive the youth where they need to go)
- Childcare (many opportunities – volunteer or otherwise – are inaccessible for young parents without the financial means or social networks to arrange childcare)
- Clothing and other donated items

Tangible incentives don't need to come out of pocket or project budget. You may find local businesses that are willing – better yet: eager – to help out by donating what they can, or offering something at a reduced price.

Intangible Benefits

Tangible incentives can provide youth with a reason or reward for getting involved. But there are intangible incentives as well that you may wish to emphasize when you recruit or attempt to retain youth.

- Skill building
- Friendships and social networks
- School credit
- Recognized volunteer hours
- Letters of reference or personal support
- Connections to community resources and people

Of course, in choosing which benefits – both tangible and intangible – to offer or emphasize depends on the youth you are trying to engage. What are they dealing with on a daily basis? What is valuable to them? What are their goals (short- and long-term)? Considering these questions will help you choose the right incentives.

4.5 TIMELINES AND SCHEDULING

Consider:

- Shorter terms and timelines
- Suitable scheduling

When setting timelines and scheduling meetings and events, remember that the more you accommodate youth's existing timelines and schedules, the greater success you will have. The more you ask youth to accommodate you and your organization, the less success you will have.

Terms and Timelines: Whether you're planning a youth project, an informal youth group, or youth involvement on an existing committee, you may have to think about ***timelines*** or ***terms*** of involvement. How long will the project last? How long will you ask youth to commit? This decision is crucial.

Firstly, youth have a different time sense and may work on a different seasonal schedule than adults, particularly adult professionals. How it time sense different? One year is a longer period when you're 15 than when you're 30. But… isn't a year just a year? 365 days? Yes. But our subjective perception of the passing of time changes as we age. Remember how ***long*** summer holidays felt when you were 10 years old? Or how long a semester felt when you were 16? Keep this in mind when you plan your youth engagement strategies.

A basic rule is to use ***shorter terms and timelines*** than you would with working professionals in your field. You might ask adult representatives to sit on your advisory committee for one or even two-year terms. Asking youth to commit for that duration is unrealistic. It's not that youth don't like commitment; it's more that for youth the future is more uncertain. When you were 18, could you say with certainty where you would be, what your schedule would be like, and what your priorities would be at age 20?

In fact, many youth don't think in terms of ***years***, per se, but seasons or sessions. That might be "in summer I'll be doing this, or "in the first semester I will be doing that." How they segment a year will depend on their situation. Some students will consider summer a time for work. Students in their final year may want to focus on their studies. Some homeless youth may have pressing survival concerns in winter, while others may have greater housing stability as they seek shelter during the cold weather.

In any case, carefully consider the profile of the youth you're engaging, including their ***age, living situation, educational status, and employment***. Time things appropriately.

If you completed Section 3 – Preparing to Engage Youth, you may have identified schools or teachers as key partners in your youth engagement strategy and have asked for their assistance in recruiting youth. Consider taking this partnership one step further and incorporating your youth engagement project directly into their education. That may mean convincing someone to grant elective credit for their activities or having a teacher allow a student to get involved to fulfill a course requirement. In any case, partnering with a school or teacher will help you arrange your timeline effectively, and marry the student's school

responsibility and volunteer work. They don't have to compete for attention if they're one and the same!

Scheduling: When it comes to scheduling, think again about the profile of your youth (those you hope to recruit or those you've already recruited). Choose days of the week that work for your youth. Weekdays may work best for many young people who are in school and have weekends that are already busy with family or extracurriculars. On the other hand, some youth lack opportunities for engagement on the weekends, since many programs and services run only five days a week.

Regarding the ***time*** of meetings and events, obviously if your youth are in school, you can't schedule things during school hours. You may also want to avoid scheduling meetings too late in the evening, for those who may have safety concerns getting home after dark. That leaves later afternoons, early evenings, and weekends. Dinner time is a great time for youth activities, since you can offer food.

Consider your youth's other engagements when scheduling, as well as key times of the month or semester during which they might be busy. Understand when youth can't attend because of poor scheduling. Remember, once again, that youth have competing priorities.

It's not necessary to plan everything upfront before recruiting youth. If you have the flexibility, consider recruiting your youth and then asking them what works for scheduling. As always, it's better to work around the youth than ask them to work around you.

Looking carefully at the profile of your youth, and asking them directly, will help determine whether you should schedule things well ahead of time or do short-term planning on a continual basis.

4.6 TRAINING AND EXPECTATIONS

Key Ideas

- Organize pre-engagement activities
- Explain the project or opportunity
- Set clear guidelines and expectations
- Build positive relationships
- Identify or assign roles and responsibilities
- Provide training and education

An essential component of supporting youth is being clear about expectations and providing the training that will enable them to make a meaningful contribution. Avoid putting young people into unfamiliar situations without the proper preparation. They may become frustrated or confused. You may also become frustrated if their actions and behaviours are not what you expected or hoped for. Those you engage might have a “can-do” attitude and show excitement about jumping into new things, but they may quickly gain a “can’t-do” attitude and lose excitement if they’re set up for failure.

Below are several suggestions and recommendations for training and expectations both at the beginning of your activities and throughout.

Organize Pre-engagement Activities: You can begin the learning and training process by giving youth tasks or mini-projects that will spark their interest and help them understand some of the issues that they will be tackling. You might have them take or create an online survey, canvass their peers or family members for opinions, or write and share their reflections on key issues. You may also want to conduct similar types of pre-engagement activities with the adult allies that will be working with the youth. If they are already knowledgeable about the issues, you may ask them to consider them from a youth perspective or survey youth in their lives about their opinions. Activities such as these can help expose both youth and adult allies to perspectives they hadn’t considered and help to spark interest in your project.

Explain the Project or Opportunity: When you recruited youth for your activities, you had to explain the opportunity in basic terms. Now’s the time to explain more fully, and clearly, the nature of the project or activities. Consider the following…

- … what has to go into the work or activities and what is expected out of it (inputs and outputs)?
- … who is involved (organizations, individuals, funders)?
- … what resources are available?
- … how will youth be supported in their work?
- … what’s the anticipated timeline (overall, from start to finish)?
- … what’s the schedule (on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis)?
- … what are the benefits to participation?

Answering these questions will help the youth understand what they're signing up for. And after learning more about the project, some people decide not to continue. Do your best to make them comfortable to express their concerns or let you know if they are no longer interested. Encourage them to approach you, or someone else, individually if that's easier. Remember to ***communicate in plain English***. In your profession or field of work, you might use language, terms, abbreviations, and acronyms that others aren't familiar with. Avoid this when possible, or take the time to explain key concepts clearly to the youth.

Set Clear Guidelines and Expectations: It is important to be clear about any expectations you have. Not being upfront about expectations can set young people up for failure. At the same time, be careful that your expectations are not too strict or set in stone. If you have youth with competing priorities, attending weekly meetings might be a challenge. Tailor your expectations accordingly. And avoid giving youth a list of expectations that reads like a job description. Engagement activities are supposed to be fun and exciting, not burdensome.

You can also ask the youth about ***their*** expectations of the project or opportunity. What do they hope to get out of it? Why are they there? What do they expect of the adult allies? Of their peers? A discussion of these expectations can help build relationships and lay the groundwork for understanding. You may learn about the youth's individual needs and interests and be able to respond accordingly.

Besides laying out expectations, you may need to establish "guidelines" for behavior and communication. For example, a list of guidelines for meetings might include "listen and respect others' opinions," "don't interrupt," "no bullying," and "keep cell phones quiet." A list of guidelines for participation might include "respond to emails within two days" and "let someone know if you can't attend." These last points draw attention to the importance of guidelines around communication. Be clear about what you want or expect.

Sometimes the guidelines are best set by the youth themselves. Ask them at the beginning what guidelines they want. Chances are they'll identify many of the same that you would, and even more. And young people whose participation is dependent on certain elements of safety should have the chance to identify those needs to the group.

Build Positive Relationships: You're not training new employees, you're engaging young people seeking interesting and meaningful opportunities. So if the initial phase of your engagement activities are completely dominated by talk of roles, responsibilities, guidelines, expectations, procedures, protocols, and training, you'll lose the room. Get to know the youth. Allow them to get to know each other. And let them get to know you, not just as a professional, but as a person. Of course you should adhere to healthy boundaries, but if your approach is too clinical or academic, it will be harder to build that relationship and establish trust.

Consider doing some team-building activities early in the engagement process. You may choose activities in which people learn about themselves and others, or activities in which people have fun or cooperate to achieve a common goal. Try and keep team-building activities light, and remember that a sense of team is best built through shared experience. Activities that are divisive, that highlight differences, or that separate certain groups of

individuals do not build team. Also remember that team-building can happen very naturally through any collaborative task; you don't always need to plan a special event to build team. Some "team-building" exercises can seem contrived or inauthentic to some people. Also consider, when appropriate, having adult allies join the team-building exercises alongside the youth, rather than standing on the sidelines and watching, which does nothing to build trust and relationships.

Identify or Assign Roles and Responsibilities: Start by giving the youth a general sense of the roles that different people or groups play in the project or activities. If you completed Section 3 – Preparing to Engage, you may have already laid out the roles and responsibilities of the youth, adult allies, the organization, and partners or the community. Share this information freely with the youth themselves and help them understand not only what their role is, but what role others play.

Your project or activities may have specific roles and responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. For example, if you are engaging a group of young people to plan a youth event, you might need someone to take care of social media, someone to design posters, and someone to organize space and equipment. These roles may be identified by the youth themselves in the course of their planning, or you may identify them ahead of time. How you do it may depend on the type and age of youth you're engaging.

At the beginning of your youth engagement project or activities, you may want to do a talent inventory with your group. A talent inventory can help to identify the skills, abilities, and interests of different individuals and help link them with suitable roles.

In any case, people should fall into roles that are suitable for them. They may volunteer for specific roles, or you may assign them according to what you believe is a good fit. You may also want to assign more than one person to each role, so they can support each other and share accountability.

Provide Training and Education: Your youth engagement activities may involve both training – in which you develop young people's skills in certain areas – and education – in which you develop young people's knowledge.

Education might concern:

- Community and social justice issues, such as homelessness
- How organizations and committees work
- How to conduct research and the importance of "evidence"
- The idea of constituency and representation

Training might include:

- Computer skills
- Public speaking
- Speaking to the media
- Conflict resolution
- Chairing a meeting

- Presentations

Consider both what is needed to fulfill the purpose, roles, and responsibilities but and what is needed or identified by the youth themselves. Check in with people regularly about education and training. Ask them: “do you feel ready or able to do X? Would you like some help learning how to do X?” We very quickly take for granted the skills that we use every day that took years to develop, and we should not expect young people to have those skills inherently or develop them through osmosis.

Education and training doesn’t need to resemble school either. People learn by doing, in organizations, on projects, and out in the community. Consider doing a “resource tour,” in which youth have the chance to visit different organizations or services in your community and learn both about what is available and about the issues.

Training is not just about enabling people to do the work of the activities or project, it’s about developing skills and confidence that extend beyond your youth engagement practices.

4.7 TRANSPORTATION, PLACES, AND SPACES

Key Ideas

- Accessibility
- Comfort
- Suitability
- Safety

Transportation: How do your youth get around? On foot? Public transit? By bicycle? In the backseat of their parent's cars? Understanding their means of transportation will help you figure out the best place to get together. If transportation poses difficulties for youth, then see if you can help them out. That could mean offering bus tickets for those who can't afford public transit, or even picking youth up and driving them to and from wherever you're getting together.

Places: Keeping in mind the youth's means of transportation, plan to meet in locations that are accessible. That could mean on a well-serviced bus route or in a location that is accessible on foot, nearby places the youth already congregate or spend time. This may or may not include the location of your organization's offices or space. If the space that is available to your organization is inaccessible, then you might want to partner with another organization that ***is*** accessible. Attendance at meetings and events may be more directly proportional to accessibility (and timing), not to motivation.

Spaces: Does the space where you plan to meet or bring youth together feel comfortable for youth in general, or the particular youth you are engaging? Is it welcoming? Friendly? Safe? Or is it cold and institutional? Intimidating? Unsafe? In coming to the place and space, are youth likely to encounter people they don't want to encounter? People who make them feel uncomfortable or pose a threat? While you may not be able to dedicate a specific space to youth activities (which would allow you to change the space), you can ***arrange*** the space in a way that makes youth feel more comfortable. That might mean moving tables and chairs around (or out of the room completely). And again, if the space that is available is not ideal, consider finding a different space. Work your network and partners and find something comfortable for the youth.

4.8 CONDUCTING MEETINGS

Key Ideas

- Meeting objectives
- Balance of structure and flexibility
- General formality and procedure
- Meeting tools
- Mix it up
- Encourage participation

Whether you have what can rightly called “meetings” depends on the nature of your youth engagement strategy or project. Regardless, you will most likely be bringing multiple youth together in one space to participate in activities, make decisions, plan, have fun, or discuss. Please see the “Special Considerations” sections to find additional advice on conducting certain types of meetings. This section will present general considerations for conducting meetings (defined generally) with youth.

Meeting objectives: Unless you’re running a drop-in program, you’ll probably need clearer objectives for a meeting than just “hanging out” or “building trust.” Those are, in fact, worthwhile activities, but if you are doing a project or have planned a youth engagement strategy, chances are you have more specific overall goals. And that means that meetings will need more specific objectives. Below is a list (by no means comprehensive) of possible meeting objectives:

- To give information / educate
- To share information
- To report on past activities / events
- To debrief experiences
- To make a decision
- To plan
- To create or design
- To discuss or explore
- To build team / relationships

Good meetings rarely have a single objective. But it should be clear what the objectives are.

Balance of Structure and Flexibility: Depending on how your group and strategy works, it may be you or the youth themselves who are designing and running meetings. Whatever the case, it is a good idea to balance structure and flexibility in meetings. It’s a good idea to have a rough agenda for each meeting, and to follow it. However, if important issues come up, you may stray from the agenda. If you do so, you should acknowledge that you’re changing the agenda and that you’ll deal with the items at another time. You may run meetings without a rough agenda, but a lack of purpose and clear direction can be frustrating to many youth.

General Formality and Procedure: Many youth (people in general, in fact) can be turned off or intimidated by rigid formality and procedure in meetings. Be lenient and don't expect the youth to understand Robert's Rules of Order. If you do have or need some formal procedures for meetings, prepare youth ahead of time so they are not surprised or so that they can learn, adapt, and thrive.

Meeting Tools: Whenever possible, provide the youth with all the tools they'll need to participate in gatherings. If they'll need pens and paper, bring them yourself.

Mix it Up! "Meetings" don't have to mean that everyone is seated around a big table stroking their chins and offering their opinions on pressing issues. You might do this from time to time, and it can give certain proceedings an air of seriousness, but doing this regularly will alienate a lot of people. So mix it up. Play games. Do activities. Hold events. Have guest speakers. Visit places in the community. Pair people up for some discussions. Break the larger group down into smaller ones. Then recombine the groups for the next stage of an activity. Get people moving, standing, walking, and engaging.

Encourage Participation: Understand if people are quiet or tentative in the early stages of your youth engagement activities, particularly if the nature of the work is unfamiliar or new to them. Group decision-making, orderly discussion, and freely expressing one's opinion with adults may not be the norm for your youth. Give them time and be patient. Adapt your approach if what you're doing really doesn't work. And ensure that everyone truly understands what is expected of them. It takes a lot of confidence to say "I don't get it."

To encourage participation, you may also want to allow time for preparation. That is, instead of having youth show up and find out what they have to do that day, let them know beforehand. You may also want to take other steps to facilitate participation by the naturally quiet or introverted. This can be done through small group or paired activities, allowing for written input or greater time for reflection, or by "roundtabling," or asking for input by every individual, one at a time.

Although it's important to encourage participation, if someone doesn't feel like contributing much, don't chastise them. On some days, just showing up is an accomplishment. And that's okay. Youth have the right to self-determination, which means they can opt out, temporarily or permanently.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Checklist of Youth Friendly Meeting

- At Halton Kids Our Kids Network Resources Site
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_Youth-friendly%20meeting%20checklist.pdf

"Youth Friendly" Meetings

- A quick guide to running youth-friendly meetings
- http://heartwood.ns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/YouthMeetings.pdf

4.9 YOUTH FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

When you get together with your youth, how do you spend the time? If you are engaging youth in a planning process, do you seat them all around a boardroom table and expect them to discuss the issues just like working professionals in an office setting? Do you have an agenda and talking points and proceed through the list logically? And if you do this, do you find the youth getting bored or distracted?

It is important to design youth-friendly activities. Whether the purpose of your gathering is to inform, discuss, make decisions, or plan, keep in mind that you should be designing activities that truly engage the young people's interests.

Here are several things to keep in mind when deciding what you will do and how you will do it:

- Keep it fun, when possible
- Make sure each activity has a clear purpose
- Provide choice of activity when possible
- Make sure activities are relevant and interesting
- Incorporate aspects of culture that are appealing to youth (e.g. music, video, etc.)
- Foster positive relationships
- Keep things fast-paced and dynamic

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ice Breakers

- Videos 3 through 8 demonstrate ice-breaker activities for youth, developed by McCreary Centre Society's Youth Advisory and Action Council
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLt4a5yTRO8&list=PLRKtNdXGBs6RzvHg3bW-ae2SGNUBqwIdE&index=3

Youth Stories

- An activity that has youth reflect on their experiences – either positive or negative – with adults
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools03.php

Free Session Plans

- Great resources for planning youth activities and work sessions, by Youth Workin It
- http://youthworkinit.com/category/youth-work-session-plan-ideas/

10 Team-Building Games that Promote Critical Thinking

- http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/10-team-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/

Team-Building Games

- North Yorkshire Youth's guide to team-building games for youth
- http://www.nyy.org.uk/youth/activityresources/team-building-games

4.10 COMMUNICATING

Modes of Communication

- Face-to-Face
- Email
- Text messaging
- Social media
- Telephone

For general advice on relating to youth, please see section **4.1 Relating to Youth**. This section provides some more specific advice around methods of communication and language.

While many people believe that styles and means of communication differ greatly between generations, it is dangerous to generalize too much about young people and communication. We can't say, for example, that "young people communicate through Facebook" (because many don't) or that "young people use a lot of slang" (because not all do). For this reason, your job is to find out what works best for the young individuals that you are engaging. What's the best way to do that? Ask them.

While we can't generalize too much, there are some things to keep in mind when communicating with youth. For starters, be yourself. Don't try adopting the slang and sound of someone you're not. That said, you can drop some of the more formal aspects of the style of communication you might use professionally and adopt a more relaxed and informal tone with young people. Still, maintain the level of politeness and respect that you expect back from the youth.

So, what are the different modes of communication and how might they be useful in communicating with young people? Let's run through a quick list:

Face-to-face: Even in a digital age, there's no substitute for face time. Building strong relationships, earning trust, developing team, and mentoring is most effective face-to-face.

Email: Depending on their age and experience, many young people don't use email very often for regular communication. Experience at university or certain jobs may have developed email skills in some young people, but for others it may be reserved for more formal communications. Many young people don't even check their email every day. And when they do communicate by email, they may not have the same standards of professional courtesy that many adults do. You may see emails that look more like text messages to friends.

Text messaging: This is a common way for many young people to stay in touch. It is instant, brief, and even possible without a cell phone plan. When response times through email are painfully slow, you may find it takes only minutes to get a response through text.

Social media: Different forms of social media are commonly used for communication, but to different extents and with different social networks. Some people prefer to reserve their

social media contact with friends, while others will use it very broadly. The best way to approach social media with young people is ask them what works for them and what doesn't. For more on social media, please see section **4.12 Social Media.**

Telephone: Many young people, even those with fairly limited means, have cell phones. But that doesn't always mean that they're reachable by phone. A phone plan costs money, and you may find that many young people don't have "minutes" or are unable to receive calls. They can still use their phones for text messaging, however.

Again, to find out what the specific individuals you are engaging prefer in terms of communication, ask them. They'll let you know.

Now, what should we keep in mind when it comes to ***language*** when communicating with young people? Here's a brief list of dos and don'ts:

DON'T	DO
... send infrequent long messages or updates via email.	... send shorter, more frequent updates.
... use jargon, technical language, or abbreviations that only people in your profession know.	... use real-world referents, concrete examples, and common terms for concepts and things (but don't dumb things down).
... use words that stereotype, generalize, or pathologize the young people you're dealing with (e.g. "vulnerable," "at-risk," "homeless...")	... honor the experience of individuals and use explanatory phrases to refer to individuals with shared experience (e.g. "people who live in poverty," "young people who have lived on the street...")
... use body language that is too assertive or closed (folding arms, standing over people, etc.)	... maintain body language that is open, non-threatening, and relaxed.

4.11 YOUTH FRIENDLY MATERIALS

Youth-friendly materials includes print materials, recruiting posters, websites, video, pictures, and anything other form of media that you use to engage, interact with, and educate youth. If you look at the materials that the average working professional encounters on a daily basis – including research reports, PowerPoint presentations, policy papers, best practice guidelines, and memos – you will find that they are ***not*** particularly youth friendly. Remember, you're not training young people to be working professionals, you're trying to ***engage*** them. And your materials should therefore be ***engaging***.

Of course, what is "engaging" to one young person might not be "engaging" to another. You must keep in mind the age and type of youth that you're trying to engage and adjust your approach accordingly. But there are some general tips for creating youth-friendly materials that will help you engage youth:

DOs	DON'Ts
Bright colours and edgy design	Drab colours or boring design (or ***no*** design element)
Text in bullet form when possible	Paragraph-form text
Photos, visuals, graphics	Exclusively text
Link ideas to real-life examples and stories that are familiar to young people	Academic / distanced / abstract discussion or presentation of topics and ideas
Simple accessible language	Academic and technical language or professional jargon

One excellent way to ensure materials are youth-friendly is to have youth themselves design them!

4.12 SOCIAL MEDIA

Key Ideas

- Utilize the media savvy
- Learn yourself
- Acknowledge change

For many young people, social media is not just a means of communication or place to put pictures; rather, it is a whole environment, and a whole way of working, playing, and living. When asked what the adult generation of their teachers and parents really don't understand about the world of youth, many young people respond that adults don't understand social media and everything that goes with it. That includes cyberbullying, a loss of privacy, instantaneity, and a more participatory culture. If you grew up with social media and cell phones, you might "get it." If you did not, you may not realize how the lives of young people have been changed.

In any case, the best thing you can do regarding social media and your youth engagement strategy is a) to utilize the young people or media savvy people in your organization, b) to learn a bit about social media yourself, and c) to acknowledge that social media and the online world in general evolve very rapidly.

Utilize the media savvy: If you're not well-versed or proficient in social media, look to those in your organization who are for help in recruiting young people through social media and in crafting social media policy (see below). It's not enough to simply know the tools and how to use them; using social media effectively involves understanding the ***culture*** of social media.

Learn yourself: Whether or not you aim to be someone who tweets opinions during a movie, it can be worthwhile to learn about social media yourself. And the best way to do that is to ask young people to teach you. But don't just learn what tools are available and how to use them, have a discussion about the culture of social media and how young people live online or through cellular connections.

Acknowledge change: A lot of young people started rejecting Facebook when their moms and aunts suddenly wanted to be their "friends." The fact is, in the 21st century the tools and technologies that people use to communicate and create change rapidly. And young people will naturally seek out online space that are free from adult oversight. So don't assume that because you set up a Facebook account you're now in touch.

You may use social media to successfully recruit young people, and you may use it on an ongoing basis with your youth. Social media can be useful in publicizing, connecting, communicating, conducting research, and disseminating information. But social media can create problems and challenges as well, and it is a good idea to create some kind of social media policy that guides your group's usage.

Key Points to Discuss with Youth

- Remember that everything is “public”
- Don’t post confidential information (yours or someone else’s)
- Don’t write anything that you wouldn’t say to someone (don’t use anonymity as a shield)

Key Questions to Discuss with Youth

- How will you respond to “inappropriate” content or postings?
- How will you deal with bullies or trolls?
- What will you do with confidential information that is posted?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Social Media Policy Guide

- From Australia’s Youth Action, a great guide to social media policy (submit form to download)
- http://www.youthaction.org.au/social_media_policy_guide

Youth Engagement and Social Media – an online guide

- A fantastic guide to using social media in youth engagement practices (from the UK)
- http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/why/youth_engagement

4.13 SUPPORTING YOUTH

Key Ideas

- Support work on specific skills
- Teach and guide, but don't patronize
- Check in regularly and limit downtime
- Connect young people with other opportunities
- Meet them where they're at
- Promote mentorship
- Cultivate leadership

#3 on the list of 10 principles of youth engagement is "support." Effective youth engagement does more than just open up an organization or process to youth or invite young people to a meeting. Effective youth engagement ***supports*** the youth's active participation in existing groups and processes and the creation of new groups and processes. Here is a general list of tips for "supporting" young people to make their participation sustained and meaningful:

Support Work on Specific Skills: Skill development is a fantastic tangible benefit for youth. Identify opportunities within your project that require specific skills, then build in support for skill development for those youth who wish to take those opportunities. For example, if you have a group of youth helping plan a youth element to a conference, you might have opportunities for making promotional materials. You might contact someone at a school or college with expertise in marketing and design, and then connect your interested youth with that expert to work on designing and printing promotional materials.

Teach and Guide, but Don't Patronize: Young people may have a desire to learn, and you may be in a position to teach them, but understand that you need to build a trusting relationship and earn respect first. Don't overstep boundaries by trying to tell young people how to live their lives or pretending that you understand what is best in their situation when you don't. You'll lose them fast if you take a patronizing attitude. Let youth identify how they want to be taught, shown, or guided.

Check in Regularly and Limit Downtime: To maintain momentum and sustain your youth's involvement, don't let weeks and weeks pass without checking in or making contact. Schedule regular activities, send text messages, ask for input, or just drop in on people to see how they're doing. When this does not occur young people can feel that the relationships is more transactional and limited rather than personal and meaningful. Remember that our time sense changes as we get older. A month feels a lot longer when you're 15 than when you're 30.

Connect Young People with Other Opportunities: Your youth engagement efforts shouldn't connect youth only with you and your organization. Real engagement is a way of life that extends beyond the walls of any one organization. Show youth other opportunities for engagement. Connect them with people and resources in the community. Many young people simply don't know what is available to them until someone they trust shows them or

introduces them. This can mean programs and services, as well as cool and interesting opportunities for personal development.

"Meet them Where They're At:" This is an expression we often hear in discussions of youth engagement, but what does it really mean to "meet youth where they're at"? In the literal sense, it means going to the youth – where they congregate, work or study, and play – rather than asking them to come to us. But in a figurative sense it means acknowledging the particular "place" they are emotionally and developmentally. If a young person is not ready for something, be understanding. If a young person hasn't had the chance to develop certain relationships skills that you take for granted, don't push him or her away. Meeting young people where they're at also means understanding that within a given day or week you and your project or process might not be at the top of their priority list. Again, don't push them away because of this. Rather than admonishing them for not following through, ask them what is possible.

Promote Mentorship: Mentors – broadly speaking – can provide guidance, wisdom, advice, and positive modelling for anyone (not just young people). But for mentoring relationships to work, there must be a natural or felt "match." Don't assume that you are a natural mentor for a young person simply by virtue of the fact that you want to be. Youth will identify you as a mentor if you're the right match. If you're not, then make sure you're providing diverse opportunities for mentorship. Bring a variety of adult allies into your youth engagement strategy. And foster ***peer mentorship*** within your group and between members of your group and other youth. You may even allow youth to participate with mentors they've previously identified.

Cultivate Leadership: Allow the youth to develop leadership skills and demonstrate leadership, both with their peers and with the community in general. Have youth themselves run meetings, give presentations in schools and community, and lead projects. Of course, you need to provide the right preparation, training, and support for them to do this confidently. And remember that different individuals may want and need different types of opportunities to fulfill their own sense of success.

4.14 ENGAGING YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Key Ideas

- Create an "environment of care"
- Assess readiness
- Inspire control, agency, and confidence
- Promote constructive conflict resolution

Prepare youth to succeed

Many of the ideas and practices in this toolkit apply to engaging youth with "lived experience," but this section will spell out some special considerations on the topic. What do we mean by "lived experience"? Experience of what? Youth with lived experience are those with firsthand experience of some of the social issues that you might be combatting or trying to solve. That means homelessness, problematic substance use, mental health concerns, discrimination, isolation, abuse or neglect, poverty, prostitution, or gang life.

The most important thing to remember if you are engaging youth with lived experience is to ***value and support them as individuals, not just as representatives of a somehow "disadvantaged" group***. A young person's experience of homelessness, for example, is only one facet of their identity. And people with experience of homelessness will have experienced the issue and now perceive it in infinitely diverse ways. Be very careful not to define people along one dimension only, especially one that is framed as a deficit. At the end of the day, you must have a good answer for the question "who will benefit from engaging such youth?" That answer should be the youth themselves, as well as other youth with similar experiences; the answer should not be solely your organization, you, or your profession. There may be secondary benefits to those three, but they should not be the primary incentive for engaging youth with lived experience.

Of course, the input, perspective, and experience of youth with lived experience can be eye-opening and valuable. And giving voice to people who have been denied voice can help us work toward the righting of social wrongs. Still, everyone involved in your organization and strategy must understand the benefits and risks of engaging youth with lived experience.

Benefits	Risks
– Skill development – Positive feeling of contributing to meaningful community work (if meaning and impact can be demonstrated) – Resume-building – Gateway to other opportunities and community resources – Positive relationships with professionals and community-builders – Feeling of greater connection to community and enhanced feelings of citizenship	– Feelings of abandonment and disappointment if not supported adequately – Feelings of giving (in terms of perspective and experience) more than receiving – Feelings of being valued not as individual but as representative of suffering and hardship – Feeling of disappointment if meaning and impact are not demonstrated – Feeling of not being treated or valued as an equal

If you can ensure that your strategy can overcome the risks outlined above, then your activities may benefit immensely from the perspective and resilience of youth with lived experience.

Consider carefully the abilities and developmental stage of the youth you are engaging and choose engagement strategies that they are likely to succeed at. For example, if you want to involve youth with experience of homelessness in the development of a community action plan, is it wise to have them sit at the same table as organizational directors and community planners? Do they have the skills and experience to contribute meaningfully to that process? Will they feel supported at that table and be valued and respected? Or would it be better to organize a separate council of youth that meets with supportive adult allies and then feeds input to the planning process? Perhaps that council can review recommendations – as a group – and provide feedback.

Below are several general considerations to bear in mind when engaging youth with lived experience:

Create an "Environment of Care": Youth with lived experience may be resilient, yet vulnerable. Ensure that your system of support is strong, responsive, holistic, and adaptable. Help meet the young people's basic needs and provide individualized support. Talk to the youth. Find out what they're experiencing. Support them where they're at. You may want to involve other adult allies that have established relationships of trust with the youth. They can help provide the right environment of care that will help the youth thrive.

Assess Readiness: Youth with lived experience will have different degrees of distance from and understanding of such experiences, as well as different degrees of readiness to talk about such experiences. Don't push them far outside their comfort zones. Allow them to

step into and out of activities when they acknowledge that their own level of readiness isn't adequate. Also bear in mind the youths' level of education.

Inspire Control, Agency, and Confidence: Many youth, particularly those who have a history of being oppressed, have been denied control and agency over their own lives, and as a result they haven't developed the confidence that goes along with it. Your engagement strategy and activities should be designed to promote a sense of control and agency. However, you may need to coach youth in roles and tasks that allow them such control. Young people may perceive that they have limited skills, and you may need to work to overcome such self-perceptions.

Understand Social Pressures: In particular, understand that engaging with adult allies may be disapproved of by peers. Social pressures to fit in, to be loyal to one's friends and cultural tribe, and to maintain street credibility and integrity can be powerful forces.

Promote Constructive Conflict Resolution: Many youth have learned to resolve conflict in unhealthy or even violent ways. Understand that this may be the case and talk through healthy ways of conflict resolution. Also understand that many youth are amazingly resilient in the face of conflict and can overcome previous conflict to form constructive relationships.

Prepare Youth to Succeed: Before putting youth in difficult or challenging circumstances, make sure you have prepared them for what they are going to experience and give them the skills necessary to succeed. For example, if you have asked a young person to participate in a community forum and answer questions about issues related to homelessness, make sure the young person understands what kinds of questions will be asked and who will be asking them. You might want to show the young person the room where the forum will take place and explain the layout and procedure for the event. You may want to conduct a mock forum with realistic questions to help develop the young person's confidence. You should also discuss what type of language and information is appropriate and what is not. All of this assumes, of course, that you have started out right by choosing a young person who has the basic emotional and developmental readiness to participate in such an event.

4.15 ENGAGING DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

Key Ideas

- Youth of different ages may work differently
- Different youth develop differently
- Youth of different ages may have different time constraints
- Older youth may mentor younger youth

If you did Section 3 – Preparing to Engage, you developed a profile of the youth you wanted to engage. That profile may have included a general age range, and many youth engagement activities are indeed targeted at a specific age. But can you engage youth of different ages? If youth is defined, at least in the work of this toolkit, as 14 to 25, could you have a project in which 14-year-olds work and make decisions alongside 25-year-olds?

Yes, it's possible. In some ways, it can be beneficial. But there are several considerations to take into account before undertaking such an activity:

Youth of different ages may work differently: Everything that is written about youth in this toolkit may be impacted by age. Emotional readiness or maturity, level of education, ways of relating, use of social media, scheduling, and daily needs, to name just a few examples, may differ.

Different youth develop differently: While youth of different ages may differ ***in general***, individuals develop differently, and there are some experiences that can impact a person's rate of emotional, psychological, and sexual development. For these reasons, there is no guarantee that everyone at a given age will be at the same stage of development.

Youth of different ages may have different time constraints: Young people in high school, young people in university, young people with jobs, and young people on the street may have radically different schedules and demands on their time. Consider this when recruiting and planning.

Older youth may mentor younger youth: Mixing age groups can bring amazing benefits in the form of mentorship and connection with slightly older peers.

4.16 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict – including everything from personality clash to extreme difference of opinion about how the world works – is a normal and natural part of human life. Positive conflict resolution skills, however, don't come programmed from birth. We have to learn them.

Many youth with lived experience of homelessness, or with experience of abuse, neglect, or oppression, may have developed non-peaceful ways of resolving conflicts. Or they may have learned to opt out when conflict arises. These may be defensive mechanisms, learned through experience, and actually effective survival techniques in certain circumstances.

During your youth engagement activities, you should expect some measure of "conflict," broadly defined. Don't avoid barriers and challenges that may provoke conflict. Instead, use them as teaching and learning opportunities and assist youth in overcoming them. Aim to problem-solve, rather than punish or alienate people when they don't behave in ways you expect or approve of. And understand that conflict can, both for groups and individuals, be cathartic. Successfully navigating conflict may make your people and your group much stronger.

4.17 SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT

Consider:

- Individual factors
- Social factors
- System-level factors

So, you've successfully devised an engagement strategy and recruited some motivated youth to join your efforts. Now how do you keep things going? In many cases, it's not ***initiating*** that is the biggest challenge but ***sustaining***.

Sustaining is all about demonstrating ***meaning***. If youth don't find meaning, if meaning is not demonstrated, they may not stay.

What keeps a young person engaged is ***not*** the same as what ties most working professionals to their jobs. In the world of work, many people (though certainly not all) view meaning as a luxury. What keeps them in a job may relate more to financial imperatives, a sense of responsibility and social duty, and organizational loyalty. With these motivators, many people stay in jobs that they not only don't find meaning in but that they actively despise! To expect the same sacrifice in youth volunteering their time is completely ludicrous. This may seem like an extreme comparison, but it serves to demonstrate the difference between professional and personal involvement. And the more you understand the difference, the better you'll engage and sustain youth on a personal level.

Of course, some youth may stick with the program out of a sense of duty, or unwillingness to disappoint adult allies. But by and large, youth may unplug when meaning cannot be demonstrated.

Individual Factors

- Challenge and a sense of competence
- Active construction of knowledge
- Compensation
- Personal skill development
- Recognition

Social Factors

- Sense of community
- Building relationships and meeting new people

System-level Factors

- Social and system-level supports
- Having an impact and seeing tangible outcomes

4.18 EXITS

Key Ideas

- Acknowledge
- Do exit interviews
- Celebrate
- Plan for succession
- Include in final acknowledgments

As hard as you work to sustain youth engagement, some of the young people you have effectively recruited will need to move on before the term of the project or process has come to an end. So how can we deal with such exits?

Acknowledge it: If someone stops attending meetings or activities, don't just say "oh well" and hope they come back one day. Acknowledge their absence. Check in. See if everything is okay and make sure they understand that stepping away is acceptable (hopefully they were clear about this even earlier) and shouldn't be accompanied by guilt.

Do exit interviews: When a young person has to leave, take the time to sit down and ask about their involvement. What did they like? What didn't they like? What motivated them to join? Why did they decide to step away? What could have been done differently?

Celebrate: Celebrating the end of someone's involvement can mean acknowledging the person at a meeting and giving them a round of applause, or it could mean throwing a party. Either way, help the person go out on a positive note and gain a sense of accomplishment despite not staying to the end.

Plan for succession: Does the exit of one person mean that another person should be welcomed to the group? That depends on your group and your strategy. But if it does, you might want to ask the exiting youth him or herself if they can help find or recommend a replacement.

Include in final acknowledgements: When your project or process finally wraps up, don't forget to mention or acknowledge the involvement of everyone who was involved at any stage, including those who did not remain involved until the end. Invite them to the wrap-up party or launch. Include their names on print materials. And get in touch with them and let them know the final outcomes, just as you do for people who stayed to the end.

4.19 PUBLICIZING, CELEBRATING, AND REPORTING BACK

Key Ideas

- Share success
- Demonstrate meaning
- Show outcomes and impact

If sustaining youth engagement means demonstrating meaning, impact, and outcomes, then we must work to show and celebrate these things, both for the community and for the youth.

Publicizing: Success stories need to be shared widely. Publicizing the successes or accomplishments of your youth engagement activities – in the traditional media, online, and in community – will help the youth realize their own success. Publicizing efforts also help to promote the principles of youth engagement more broadly and encourage other organizations and individuals to engage youth. Publicizing means sharing what has been accomplished and created in schools, government, non-profit organizations, and throughout the community. You can also think beyond your own community. There are people from around your province and the entire country who will be interested to know what you're doing and how you're doing it. Here's a brief list of ways to publicize what you've done:

- Hold a conference or public forum
- Create a public exhibition of artwork or photography that relates to your project
- Hold a media event to discuss your efforts and accomplishments
- Talk with newspapers, radio stations, and television stations
- Create a website, video, or other online tool for showing what you've done
- Publish a report, research, or a resource tool
- Stage a performance of music, drama, poetry, or dance related to your activities
- Use social media to spread the word and show the entire world what you've done

Celebrating: Publicizing the accomplishments of your youth engagement activities helps to celebrate your activities and give the youth a sense of meaning, but you may celebrate in other ways as well, with just the youth and/or community partners who contributed to your activities. To celebrate, you might want to:

- Hold an awards ceremony to honor the young people who have been involved
- Hold a party, possibly with food and/or live music
- Create a collaborative art piece to commemorate your activities

Reporting: How can we demonstrate tangible outcomes and impact? One way is to report back to youth after their involvement has come to an end. If, for example, you conducted a youth consultation during the development of a community action plan, then go back to those youth once the plan is complete and show them the result. Explain to them how their input has been incorporated. Demonstrate the meaning of their influence and activity in terms they understand. Failing to report back to youth may lead them to feel their involvement was merely tokenism or reinforce any existing perceptions of powerlessness or lack of voice.

4.20 INITIATING A YOUTH PROJECT

Initiating a youth project is a great way to engage youth in your group or organization, especially as a first step to a larger youth engagement strategy. What kinds of projects might you initiate?

Types of Projects

- Awareness raising
- Research
- Program evaluation
- Program design
- Art or performance
- Communications planning
- Community mapping
- Celebrations
- Fundraising

Here are some tips for running a successful youth project:

Highlight incentives: How will youth benefit by being involved in the project? You may provide both tangible benefits – including food and honorariums – and intangible benefits – including skill development and social involvement. ***(see 4.4 for more on incentives)***

Define the scope or purpose clearly: Give the youth a clear sense of what they should accomplish. Rather than "raise awareness," which is loosely defined and doesn't have concrete outcomes, you may want something like "write and produce a three-minute video to raise awareness."

Have clear timelines: Make sure your project is achievable within a certain period of time, and that the timeline is communicated clearly to the youth. An open-ended project with no clear end date can be unappealing to youth, and lead to attrition or loss of focus and motivation.

Provide the right resources and support: What tools and training do the youth need to successfully accomplish the task? If you cannot provide the right tools and training yourself, be prepared to connect the youth with people who can.

Let them be creative: Help the youth accomplish the project purpose effectively, and within given time and resources, but don't put a damper on their creativity. Encourage new ideas, new methods, and ways of achieving the purpose that you might not have thought of.

Wrap it up nicely: When the project is finished, make sure you publicize and celebrate the youth's efforts. Show impact. Be thankful. Demonstrate meaning.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cross-Canada Mapping of Youth-led and/or Highly Youth-engaged Initiatives: Final Report

- Taking it Global's survey of youth initiatives and youth engagement practices throughout Canada
- http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/clc/report/The-Report-Final.pdf

Community Service Ideas for Youth: Why Giving Back Matters

- Great links to project and service ideas for youth of different age categories
- http://www.rootsofaction.com/community-service-ideas-for-youth/

Art Reach Toronto

- A fantastic list of resources for youth-led organizations and projects
- https://artreach.org

4.21 ORGANIZING A YOUTH EVENT

Youth events can be fun and energizing ways of getting youth more involved in your organization or group.

Types of Events

- Fundraising (for another youth initiative)
- Raising awareness
- Publicizing successes, plans, or services
- Youth networking
- Youth empowerment and voice
- Input gathering
- Celebrations

Here are some tips for running a successful youth event:

Involve youth in the planning: Why guess what will be appealing or engaging to youth? Have youth themselves help plan the event. Or make the event planning into a youth project in and of itself.

Make it youth-friendly: Everything from the activities you do at the event to the materials you provide and the ways you promote the event should be youth-friendly.

Consider time and place carefully: When and where you hold your event depends on who you want to attract. Look at the school and community calendar to make sure you don't overlap with other major activities or events. And hold it in a place that youth are familiar with and can get to.

Think about incentives and benefits: Why should youth attend your event? They need to see clear benefits or incentives, whether that's a fun chance to connect with other young people, or a chance to improve their skills. And remember: no event is complete without food.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Sample Forms for a Youth Engagement Event

- Includes participant consent form, photo and video release form, participant expectations list, and record of medical history
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Forms.pdf

So you want to host a youth conference?

- A quick guide with tips and advice for organizing a successful youth conference
- https://charityvillage.com/Content.aspx?topic=So_you_want_to_host_a_youth_conference_How_to_make_your_next_event_truly_engaging#.VhK0f3pViko

4.22 CONSULTING WITH YOUTH

If you need feedback, opinions, perspectives, or input from youth, there are a variety of consultation methods you can use.

Consultation methods

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Surveys (oral, paper, online)
- Sharing circles
- Invitation of multimedia input

Here are some tips for conducting effective youth consultation:

Consider whose input you want: Are you looking for input from a particular segment of youth? Or are you looking for general input from "youth?" Thinking about whose input you seek will help determine how and where you recruit youth. And if you're looking for general input, ensure you're capturing a diverse crowd.

Provide tangible incentives: Give youth a good reason to participate, whether it's food or an honorarium. This shows you respect their time.

Recruit wisely: You may want to leverage partnerships with youth-serving organizations to help recruit youth. Ensure recruiting materials – like posters or flyers – provide all the necessary information someone might need to decide whether or not to attend.

Ensure youth-friendly space: If you asking youth to come to a specific location to provide input, make sure that location is accessible. Also make sure the space itself, and how you conduct your session, is youth-friendly. That means welcoming, non-judgmental, safe, and engaging.

Report back: Find a way to report back to the youth about how their input was used or what you learned through your consultation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions: A Handbook for Organizations Working with Young People

- A great how-to handbook that outlines different methods of consultation and the relative benefits and disadvantages of each.
- http://www.youthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/Consulting+Young+People+About+Their+Ideas+and+Opinions.pdf

How to Consult Young People Effectively

- A great primer on consulting with youth, with tips and tricks
- http://youthworktoolbox.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/How-to-consult-young-people-effectively1.pdf

Youth Consultation Toolkit

- An excellent and comprehensive guide to consulting with youth (from Australia)
- http://www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/4990/youth-consultation-toolkit.pdf

4.23 HAVING YOUTH SERVE ON A BOARD OR COMMITTEE

Many committees, boards, or councils believe that they would benefit from input by youth at the committee level.

Types of Groups that might Engage Youth

- Advisory groups
- Research groups
- Policy-making committees
- Governance and oversight
- Fundraising and philanthropy
- Organization and planning

Engaging youth on committees and other groups effectively is challenging. Here are a few tips:

Provide the right training and make expectations clear: What exactly do you want the youth to do during your meetings or other activities? Explain clearly what you are looking for, and what the expected behaviours are during meetings.

Allow youth to interview the committee: Because youth may feel outnumbered in your group, try flipping the power relationship and having youth interview the committee for the privilege of the youth's participation. Encourage youth to ask any and all questions that they need answered to make their decision.

Provide the right support: How can you ensure that the youth can get to meetings (transportation) and contribute confidently? You may want to prepare them before meetings and debrief after meetings. It helps if one or two people on your committee can mentor the youth in their role. It also helps if you have youth serve in pairs, since they can then support each other.

Be flexible: Don't expect youth to commit for the same time period you might expect from professionals in the field. Understand when the youth can't attend meetings. Consider having more than one youth member and ask that at least one attend each meeting.

Engage youth with lived experience carefully: If you want the perspective of youth with lived experience (of homelessness, substance use, mental illness, etc.), think carefully if having them serve on your committee is the best way to get that perspective. If it is, make sure they're well-supported, respected for more than just their experiences, and given opportunities to make meaningful contributions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Young People on Boards and Committees: A Handbook for Organizations Working with Young People

- A great how-to handbook outlining why and how to involve young people on the level of boards and committees
- Download from: http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/yacvicother-publications-and-resources/48-youth-participation/437-taking-young-people-seriously-handbooks

Youth Survey for Team Inclusiveness

-
- A survey tool to find out how your youth committee or team members feel about your youth engagement efforts
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Asset-Building

4.25 INITIATING A NEW YOUTH GROUP

To engage youth, you may want to support the formation of a youth group connected to your organization. A youth group might serve one or more purposes.

Purposes of a Youth Group

- Providing input or advice into ongoing processes
- Contributing to planning or oversight
- Skill development
- Education and public awareness
- Advocacy and promotion of social justice
- Fundraising
- Planning

Here are a few tips for initiating and sustaining an effective youth group:

Be clear about purpose and scope: If the purpose of the group is not well-defined, it may be difficult both to attract and to retain people. Youth want to see meaning and outcomes, and that's easier with a well-defined purpose.

Provide adequate support and resources: What will the youth group need to do its work? That might include space, money, and materials, but it might also mean time from staff and volunteers. If the group develops its own goals, ensure that you can help them achieve them.

Think about incentives and benefits: Why should youth join the group? They need to see clear benefits or incentives, whether that's a fun chance to connect with other young people, or a chance to improve their skills. Provide food when possible.

Publicize, celebrate, and demonstrate impact: Broadcast the group's existence and work throughout the community. Thank and acknowledge the youth for their hard work. And show them how they've made a difference to the organization and community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

YAC Link: Tips and Tricks for Starting a Youth Advisory Council

- A fantastic toolkit for developing Youth Advisory Councils within your organization
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/YAC-Link-web.pdf

It's a Girl Thang: A Manual on Creating Girls Groups

- A toolkit for creating groups for marginalized and at-risk pre-adolescent and adolescent girls, by McCreary Youth Foundation.
- http://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/its_a_girl_thang.pdf

5. TOOLS and RESOURCES

In this section of the National Youth Engagement Toolkit, you will find links to valuable tools and resources that will help in many different aspects of your youth engagement strategy.

5.1 OTHER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKITS

Supporting Youth in our Communities: A Manual for Adult Allies in Yukon

- A great resource for adult allies put out by the McCreary Centre society
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities.pdf

Youth Engagement Toolkit

- Joint Consortium for School Health's great toolkit for youth engagement
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/

Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide

- The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development's toolkit guide, with lots of great advice on engaging youth from diverse backgrounds
- http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth_engagement/pdf/yet_resource_guide.pdf

Engaging Youth A How To Guide for Youth Serving Organizations

- The National Youth Homelessness Learning Community's brief handbook on effective youth engagement
- http://learningcommunity.ca/lcwp/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Youth-Engagement-Handbook-Final.pdf

Yerp

- A fantastic and comprehensive online toolkit with advice for both youth and youth engagers
- http://yerp.yacvic.org.au/about

A Guide to Youth Friendly Practices: Youth Engagement

- The City of Calgary's Youth Engagement Toolkit
- http://youthcore.ca/download.php?id=96

5.2 THEORY AND IDEAS

Engaging with Children and Young People

- Mary Kellet of the Open University provides some theoretical background and discussion of ethics of youth engagement
- http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=ccyp_pubs

From Participation to Engagement: A Review of Conceptual Models for Developing Youth Engagement Strategies

- A comprehensive description of types and models of youth engagement.
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/html5/

Halton Regions Corporate Youth Engagement Policy

- An example of a municipal youth engagement policy
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_Halton%20Hills%20youth%20engagementrecommendation.pdf

Continuum of Youth Engagement

- An in-depth look at different types of youth engagement, by Our Kids Network
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_OKN%20continuum%20of%20youth%20engagement.pdf

Youth Engagement Literature Review

- The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health's literature review on youth engagement
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/JCSH_Lit_Review.pdf

Town of Halton Hills: Corporate Youth Engagement Strategy

- Example of a municipal youth engagement strategy
- http://haltonhills.ca/calendars/2014/R-2014-0022.pdf

5.3 RESOURCES FOR ADULT ALLIES

Allies in Action: Two Workshops for Adults Who Want to Be Allies to Young People

- Designed by the Saskatoon Action Circle on Youth Sexuality, the first of two workshops is devoted broadly to youth engagement, while the second focused more on sexual health and youth sexuality
- http://www.tigweb.org/images/resources/tool/docs/809.pdf

Adult Allies in Action

- Background and reflective exercises for adult allies
- http://archives.studentscommission.ca/yap/resources/alliesFinal_web_e.pdf

Adult Ally Traffic Lights (pp. 78-79 in Supporting Youth in our Communities)

- A simple reflection on the status of different youth engagement practices in your organization
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities.pdf

Adult Ally Self-Reflection (pp. 80-82 in Supporting Youth in our Communities)

- A self-reflection exercise that requires you to consider your attitudes and approaches to youth
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities.pdf

5.4 CONSULTING WITH YOUTH

Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions: A Handbook for Organizations Working with Young People

- A great how-to handbook that outlines different methods of consultation and the relative benefits and disadvantages of each.
- http://www.youthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/Consulting+Young+People+About+Their+Ideas+and+Opinions.pdf

How to Consult Young People Effectively

- A great primer on consulting with youth, with tips and tricks
- http://youthworktoolbox.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/How-to-consult-young-people-effectively1.pdf

Youth Consultation Toolkit

- An excellent and comprehensive guide to consulting with youth (from Australia)
- http://www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/4990/youth-consultation-toolkit.pdf

5.5 INVOLVING YOUTH ON COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

Young People on Boards and Committees: A Handbook for Organizations Working with Young People

- A great how-to handbook outlining why and how to involve young people on the level of boards and committees
- Download from: http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/yacvicother-publications-and-resources/48-youth-participation/437-taking-young-people-seriously-handbooks

Youth Survey for Team Inclusiveness

- A survey tool to find out how your youth committee or team members feel about your youth engagement efforts
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Asset-Building

5.6 HANDBOOKS FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING THEMSELVES

Creating Change in your Community: A Handbook for Young People

- A practical handbook that teaches young people about how to organize and make change in their communities.
- Download from: http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/yacvicother-publications-and-resources/48-youth-participation/437-taking-young-people-seriously-handbooks

Change the World (by having fun): Youth Civic Engagement Toolkit

- The YWCA's inspiring toolkit for young women who want to become civically engaged and change the world.
- http://ywcacanada.ca/data/documents/00000334.pdf

5.7 FORMING YOUTH GROUPS AND COUNCILS

YAC Link: Tips and Tricks for Starting a Youth Advisory Council

- A fantastic toolkit for developing Youth Advisory Councils within your organization
- http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/YAC-Link-web.pdf

It's a Girl Thang: A Manual on Creating Girls Groups

- A toolkit for creating groups for marginalized and at-risk pre-adolescent and adolescent girls, by McCreary Youth Foundation.
- http://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/its_a_girl_thang.pdf

5.8 ETHICS

Declaration of Accountability: On The Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations

- Prepared by First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, reflective exercises and a declaration of ethically sound youth engagement practices.
- http://www.fncfcs.com/sites/default/files/docs/declaration_accountability.pdf

Guidelines for the Ethical Engagement of Young People

- An excellent framework of ethical principles for youth engagement, by Jordan Alderman Nishad Khanna Cindy Blackstock Shannon Balla
- http://www.fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/Guidelines-Ethical-Youth-Engagement.pdf

Policy Statement Template

- At Halton Kids Our Kids Network Resources Site
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Embed%20AB_Policy%20examples.pdf

Commitment Letter Template

- At Halton Kids Our Kids Network Resources Site
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Asset-Building

5.9 ACTIVITIES

Ice Breakers

- Videos 3 through 8 demonstrate ice-breaker activities for youth, developed by McCreary Centre Society's Youth Advisory and Action Council
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLt4a5yTRO8&list=PLRKtNdXGBs6RzvHg3bW-ae2SGNUBqwIdE&index=3

Youth Stories

- An activity that has youth reflect on their experiences – either positive or negative – with adults
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools03.php

Free Session Plans

- Great resources for planning youth activities and work sessions, by Youth Workin It
- http://youthworkinit.com/category/youth-work-session-plan-ideas/

10 Team-Building Games that Promote Critical Thinking

- http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/10-team-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/

Team-Building Games

- North Yorkshire Youth's guide to team-building games for youth
- http://www.nyy.org.uk/youth/activityresources/team-building-games

5.10 MEETINGS

Checklist of Youth Friendly Meeting

- At Halton Kids Our Kids Network Resources Site
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_Youth-friendly%20meeting%20checklist.pdf

“Youth Friendly” Meetings

- A quick guide to running youth-friendly meetings
- http://heartwood.ns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/YouthMeetings.pdf

5.11 YOUTH PROJECTS

Cross-Canada Mapping of Youth-led and/or Highly Youth-engaged Initiatives: Final Report

- Taking it Global's survey of youth initiatives and youth engagement practices throughout Canada
- http://tig.phpwebhosting.com/clc/report/The-Report-Final.pdf

Community Service Ideas for Youth: Why Giving Back Matters

- Great links to project and service ideas for youth of different age categories
- http://www.rootsofaction.com/community-service-ideas-for-youth/

Art Reach Toronto

- A fantastic list of resources for youth-led organizations and projects
- https://artreach.org/resources/toolkits-2/

5.12 EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Youth Engagement Survey Map

- A tool for adults and youth to reflect on and describe their experiences in youth-adult partnerships.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools01.php

Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit

- An open-ended method of gathering participants' thoughts about their engagement experience.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools03.php

Youth Engagement Surveys and Tools

- A variety of surveys and tools for assessing organizational culture, youth participant experiences, youth-adult partnerships, and engagement practices.
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/tools00.php

Workshop Evaluation – Youth Participant

- A survey for youth participants to complete after a workshop
- http://archives.studentscommission.ca/blueprint/workshop04_e.php

Youth Meeting Evaluation – Participants

- A tool for collecting feedback on youth's experiences at a meeting
- http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/resources/mtg_evalyouth_paper.pdf

Indicator Framework: Initiating Youth Engagement

- A simple framework for assessing an organization's initial youth engagement strategies / approaches
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Init.pdf

Assessment Tool: Initiating Youth Engagement

- An excellent starting point for organizations wishing to initiate a youth engagement strategy
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Init.pdf

Indicator Framework: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement

- A framework for assessing an organization's ongoing youth engagement strategies and approaches based on 8 key criteria
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Qualities.pdf

Assessment Tool: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement

- An excellent and comprehensive assessment tool for discussion and evaluation an organization's youth engagement practices around 8 key criteria
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Qualities.pdf

Indicator Framework: Sustaining Youth Engagement

- A simple framework for assessing an organization's ongoing youth engagement strategies / approaches
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Indicator_Sus.pdf

Assessment Tool: Sustaining Youth Engagement

- A great tool for evaluating an organization's ongoing youth engagement practices
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Assess_Sus.pdf

Organizational Assessment Checklist

- A great tool for assessing your organization's assets and readiness for youth engagement
- http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Page/Files/87_Engagement_Organizational%20readiness%20checklist.pdf

5.13 ANTI-OPPRESSION

An Overview of Anti-Oppressive Practice

- By Donna Baines
- https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/socialwork/assets/docs/2013%20bswapplications/Chapter%201%20-%20An%20Overview%20of%20Anti-Oppressive%20Practice_Final.pdf

5.14 EVENTS

Sample Forms for a Youth Engagement Event

- Includes participant consent form, photo and video release form, participant expectations list, and record of medical history
- http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/ye-book/resources/Forms.pdf

So you want to host a youth conference?

- A quick guide with tips and advice for organizing a successful youth conference
- https://charityvillage.com/Content.aspx?topic=So_you_want_to_host_a_youth_conference_How_to_make_your_next_event_truly_engaging#.VhK0f3pViko

5.15 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media Policy Guide

- From Australia's Youth Action, a great guide to social media policy (submit form to download)
- http://www.youthaction.org.au/social_media_policy_guide

Youth Engagement and Social Media – an online guide

- A fantastic guide to using social media in youth engagement practices (from the UK)
- http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/why/youth_engagement