YOUTH POWER!

The How To's of Youth Guided Practice

A Guide for Individuals Who Are Engaging, Supporting, and/or Overseeing the Work of Youth to Develop, Improve, and Sustain Youth Guided Practices

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About YOUTH POWER!:

YOUTH POWER! is the New York State network of young people who have been labeled and are seeking change. Together, we have decided to speak up about our experiences because no one knows what it is like for us better than we do. Through peer-to-peer mentoring, we empower young people to be active citizens, aware of government operations, their rights and the ability to use their voices to influence policies, practices, regulation and law. We are young people helping other people, ensuring availability of self-help and peer support while changing systems so that young people get the support they need with the respect and dignity they deserve.

To learn more, visit www.YOUTHPOWERNY.org

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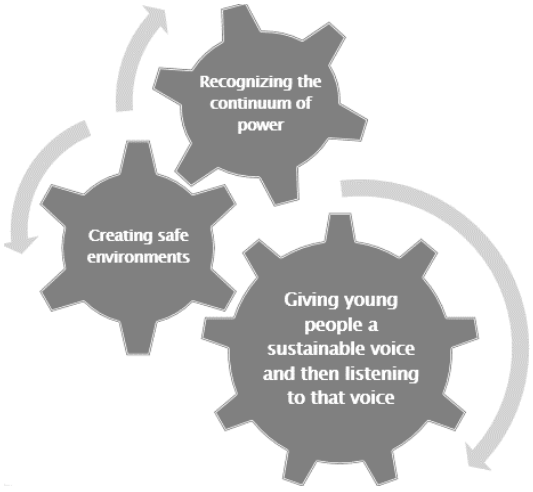
Part One: Defining Youth Guided Practice

"If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought in a group of white people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there'd probably be a public outcry. It would be the same thing for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us."

- *Jason, 17 years old, Youth Force Member*
  (Profiles of Youth Engagement and Voice in New York State: Current Strategies, 2002, p. 3)

"System of Care" is a philosophy that sets the framework for a coordinated network of community-based services and supports. A core component of the NYS System of Care definition is being *youth guided*.

What Does Youth Guided Mean?



"Youth guided means that young people have the right to be empowered, educated, and given a decision making role in the care of their own lives as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all youth in the community, state and nation. This includes giving young people a sustainable voice and then listening to that voice. Youth guided organizations create safe environments that enable young people to gain self-sustainability in accordance with the cultures and beliefs with which they identify. Further, a youth guided approach recognizes that there is a continuum of power that should be shared with young people based on their understanding and maturity in a strength based change process. Youth guided organizations recognize that this process should be fun and worthwhile" (Youth M.O.V.E. National).

Essentially, this is youth being engaged as equal partners in creating systems change. Systems of care should strive to create meaningful partnerships between adults and youth in planning, implementation, evaluation, and more.

This value calls for a change from where adults have usually worked on behalf of youth, to the development of youth-adult partnerships. Youth involvement can take a variety of

forms, but not all types of youth involvement meet the definition of “youth guided” (Barnes & Polvere, 2015, p. 2). The term youth guided is often used interchangeably with youth involvement, youth participation, youth-adult partnerships, youth empowerment, and youth voice. Instead, these terms collectively embody what it means to be youth guided, demonstrating different components and ways in which youth are a part of systems change. A key idea to challenge when engaging in youth guided practice is that in order to be youth guided, a group must be formed. Youth groups can be extremely beneficial to those involved, but it is important to recognize when a peer support group is youth guided, and the difference between having a peer support group and youth being actively engaged in decision-making. Having multiple components and various levels of meaningful youth involvement and youth voice, and the level of authentic youth-adult partnership, is what ultimately leads to a system of care being youth guided.

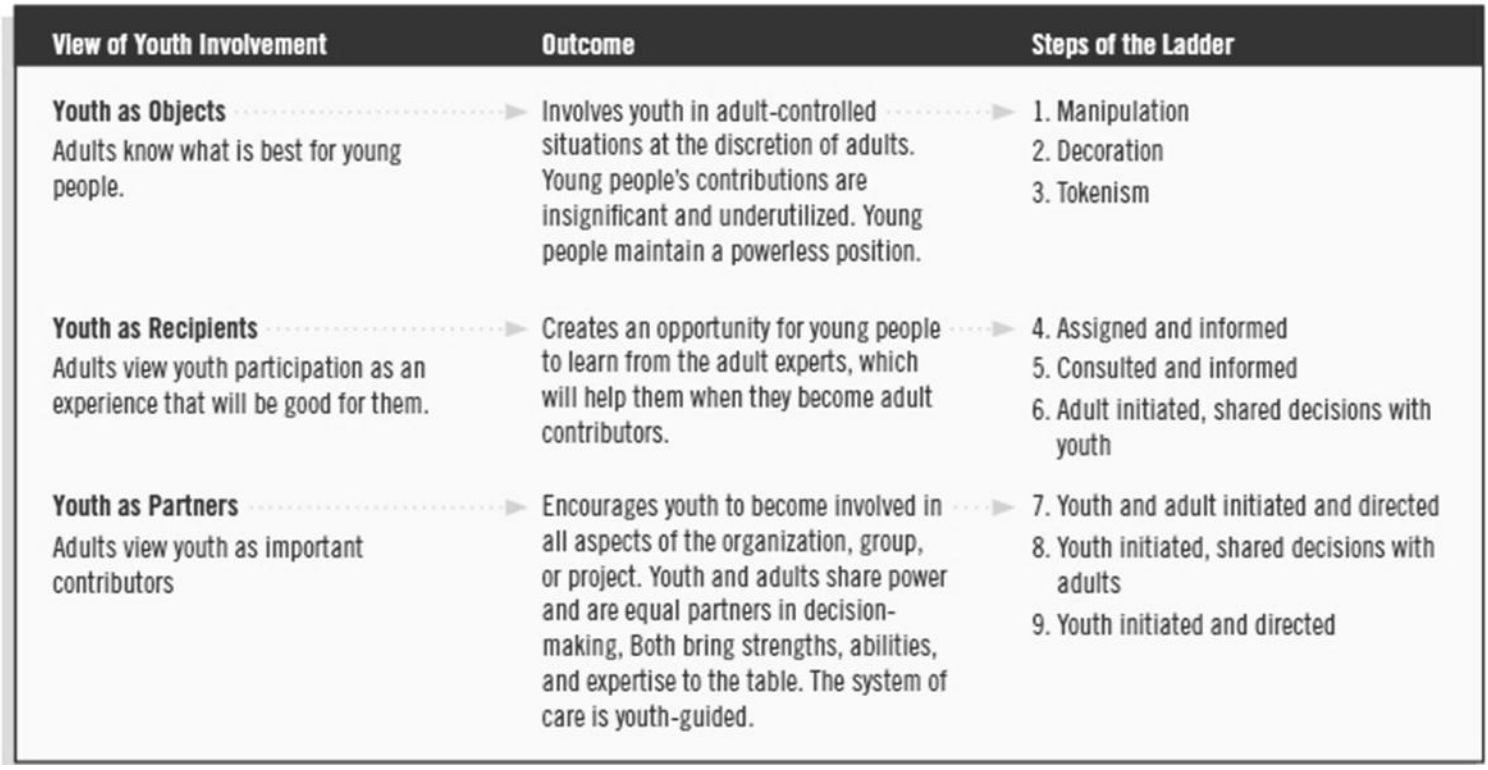
. The five primary values in partnering with youth include:

- Cultivating and maintaining a strength-based focus
- Sharing power and empowering young people
- Recognizing and avoiding adultism
- Valuing cultural and linguistic competence
- Valuing youth culture

Hart’s Ladder of Youth Involvement

Building a partnership with young people requires an understanding of the views of those young people and a willingness to change perceptions if necessary. “Hart’s Ladder,” or the Ladder of Youth Involvement, illustrates the different relationships adults can choose to engage in with youth. Each rung of the ladder stands for the different types of youth involvement. As one moves closer to the top, maximum youth involvement is approached and a youth-adult partnership becomes a reality. Understanding how adults view young people can help adults refrain from tokenizing youth. Young people can be involved in many different ways, but how they are involved and the level of authentic partnership makes the difference (Matarese, McGinnis, & Mora, 2005, pp. 17-18)

It is important to note that this illustration is meant to measure each instance of youth voice. Groups and organizations also do not have to move up each rung in order to achieve authentic youth involvement. It is also important to remember that tokenism, decoration, and manipulation are not examples of youth participation. You do have the choice to move away from these methods towards more meaningful participation.



View of Youth Involvement	Outcome	Steps of the Ladder
Youth as Objects Adults know what is best for young people.	Involves youth in adult-controlled situations at the discretion of adults. Young people's contributions are insignificant and underutilized. Young people maintain a powerless position.	1. Manipulation 2. Decoration 3. Tokenism
Youth as Recipients Adults view youth participation as an experience that will be good for them.	Creates an opportunity for young people to learn from the adult experts, which will help them when they become adult contributors.	4. Assigned and informed 5. Consulted and informed 6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with youth
Youth as Partners Adults view youth as important contributors	Encourages youth to become involved in all aspects of the organization, group, or project. Youth and adults share power and are equal partners in decision-making, Both bring strengths, abilities, and expertise to the table. The system of care is youth-guided.	7. Youth and adult initiated and directed 8. Youth initiated, shared decisions with adults 9. Youth initiated and directed

(Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A Guide to Empowerment, 2005)

1. ***Manipulation*** is where adults use youth to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by youth.
2. ***Decoration*** is where young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way.
3. ***Tokenism*** is where young people appear to be given a voice, but, in fact, have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.
4. ***Assigned but informed*** is where youth are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.
5. ***Consulted and informed*** is when youth give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The youth are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.
6. ***Adult initiated, shared decisions with youth*** is when projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making power is shared with the young people.
7. ***Youth and adult initiated and directed*** is when projects and programs are initiated by both the youth and adults as equal partners.
8. ***Youth initiated, shared decisions with adults***, is when projects or programs are initiated by youth and decision-making is shared among youth and adults. These projects empower youth while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.
9. ***Youth initiated and directed*** is when young people initiate and direct a project but the decision-making is shared with the young people.

What are the Benefits of Youth Guided Practice?

When engaging in youth guided practice, youth are not the only ones who benefit. Through Positive Youth Development strategies that are a core component of youth guided practice, and promoting youth civic activism, adults, organizations, policymakers, communities, families, and youth all benefit from youth involvement.

Benefits to Adults/Organizations/Policymakers/Communities/Others

- Develop a better understanding of the needs and issues of the youth population they serve
- Develop systems that are more creative and better meet the needs of children and families
- Generate fresh and innovative ideas of young people
- Bring clarity to the mission of an organization or agency
- Enhance the commitment and energy of adults
- Gain a different perspective of youth experiences with multisystem involvement
- Increase its understanding of how young people view the world
- Know what works and does not work based on real world youth experience
- Interact with youth to overcome youth culture stereotypes
- See the positive things youth have to offer

Benefits to Families

- See their sibling or child evolve into a leader with competencies and a sense of belonging, self-advocacy, and independence skills
- See that their children are resilient
- View the youth as a model for the family for utilizing experiences, disabilities, mental health, etc. as a strength
- Become more strength-based as they see the youth growing and becoming change agents

Benefits to Youth

- Develop confidence through completing empowering tasks and feeling heard
- Make friends and have a peer support network
- Create a better system that will help themselves and others
- Understand the community and government in a different way
- Develop leadership experience and various other skills that will be useful throughout life
- Build connections and professional resources

Adapted From: Technical Assistance Partnership "Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A guide to Empowerment", January 2005.

Positive Youth Development in Systems of Care

Reflecting on the definition of youth guided, through true youth guided practices individuals engage in an approach called Positive Youth Development (PYD) to empower and educate youth. PYD is a framework that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities, and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential, which in turn supports system of care values. This approach focuses on strengths and positive outcomes to help young people develop competencies, values, and connections they need for life and work (ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, 2016). Involving youth and engaging in PYD strategies can have powerful results on the way youth are engaged and further support the outcomes organizations are striving to support youth in achieving.

This empirically derived approach:

- Acknowledges that preventing negative risk behaviors alone limits the ability to facilitate a success transition into adulthood
- Recognizes that youth require developmental supports and opportunities in order to gain the necessary skills and attributes to be healthy and contribute to their communities in youth and adulthood
- Values the role of the youth-adult relationships as a strategy to encourage positive development
- Involves youth in authentic leadership and decision-making capacities in order to enhance psychosocial development, civic engagement, and positive attitudes toward the future

(Center for Excellence)

Positive Youth Development Frameworks

Two examples of PYD Frameworks are the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets and the Circle of Courage. These frameworks include the importance of personal power, caring, responsibility, and utilizing youth as resources. Youth-guided practice and youth civic engagement activities fit within these frameworks and provide positive youth development activities.

The 40 Developmental Assets

The Search Institute identified 40 Developmental Assets that have been demonstrated to increase the chances of youth succeeding in school and becoming happy, healthy, and contributing members of their community and society. These include both external assets such as support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, and internal assets such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

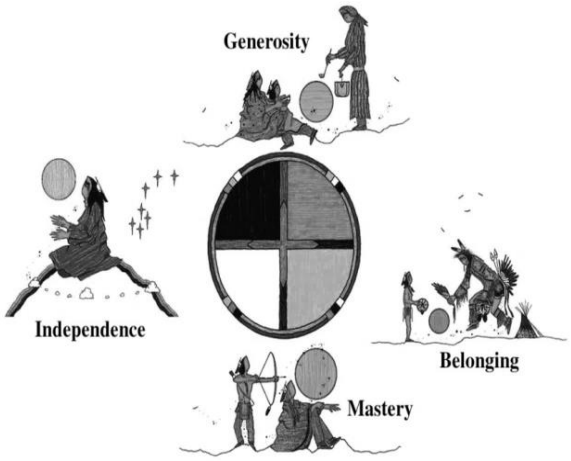
Studies of more than five million young people across the country, in addition to studies in other countries) have consistently shown that the more Developmental Assets young people have, the more likely they are to be prepared for life and the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high risk behaviors. Findings have also included that youth are more likely to:

- Do well in school
- Be persistent in the face of challenges and adversity
- Take care of their own health
- Value diversity among their peers
- Be involved in leadership roles in an organization or group

For more information on the Search Institute's 40 Developmental assets and their research, please visit http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18.

The Circle of Courage

This model incorporates the cultural wisdom of tribal peoples, the practice wisdom of professional pioneers in education and youth work, and findings from modern youth development research. The Circle of Courage is based in four universal growth needs of all youth: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity and are described as the following:



Belonging: In Native American and First Nations cultures, significance was nurtured in communities of belonging. Lakota anthropologist Ella Deloria described the core value of belonging in these simple words: "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know." Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds that draw all into relationships of respect. Theologian Marty observed that throughout history the tribe, not the nuclear family, always ensured the survival of the culture. Even if parents died or were not responsible, the tribe was always there to nourish the next generation.

Mastery: Competence in traditional cultures is ensured by guaranteed opportunity for mastery. Children were taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience. A person with greater ability was seen as a model for learning, not as a rival. Each person strives for mastery for personal growth, but not to be superior to someone else. Humans have an innate drive to become competent and solve problems. With success in surmounting challenges, the desire to achieve is strengthened. To lead by example and be responsible.

Independence: Power in Western culture was based on dominance, but in tribal traditions it meant respecting the right for independence. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, Native teaching was designed to build respect and teach inner discipline. From earliest childhood, children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults modeled, nurtured, taught values, and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion. It means that people can rely on you and trust you at all times.

Generosity: Finally, virtue was reflected in the preeminent value of generosity. The central goal in Native American child-rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In the words of a Lakota Elder, "You should be able to give away your most cherished possession without your heart beating faster." In helping others, youth create their own proof of worthiness: they make a positive contribution to another human life.

For more information on the Circle of Courage, please visit https://www.starr.org/training/youth/aboutcircleofcourage.

Youth Civic Engagement

Civic engagement describes "the practices, principles and socioeconomic conditions that comprise the environment in which people interact with their community and come together to make and implement community decisions that provide justice and opportunity" (Holley, 2016). It is through this engagement that youth and adult allies make policies more responsive and beneficial. This is the same as "youth-guided practices." It is just different terminology.

According to the Social Policy Research Associates for the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, being active in civic engagement, or civic activism, is a powerful approach for reaching youth who are often not reached by conventional youth development programs and a strategy for developing youth leadership. Findings from the Youth Leadership for Development Initiative identified three core reasons that older, more "challenged" youth join civic activism organizations.

Civic activism organizations provide youth the space to focus on their own cultures and backgrounds. Through seeing themselves reflected in peers, adult leaders, and in the issues address by groups, young people engaged in an identity search to better understand themselves. This was especially motivated by internalized negative views of themselves.

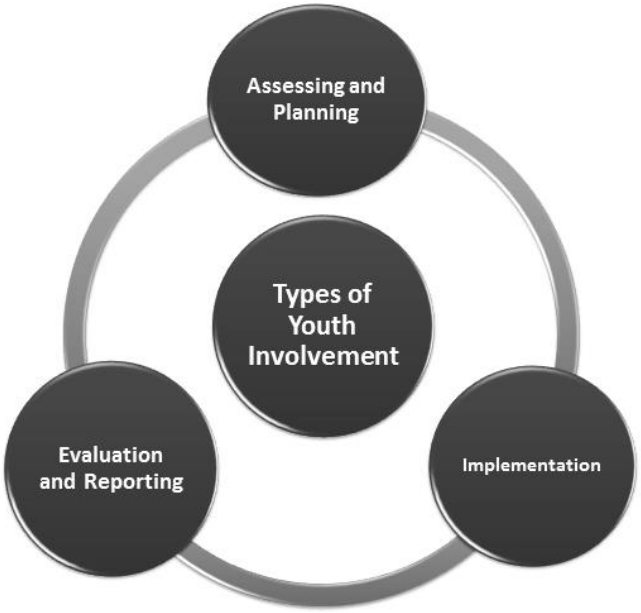
Civic activism provides a forum for youth to reflect on and address the day-to-day challenges faced by their families and communities. Rather than service-oriented settings blaming young people or their families for making "bad choices," organizations encouraged youth to reflect on their institutions and society. Through doing so, youth were able to name some of the barriers facing their families and communities, such as inadequate school resources, inadequate policing, unsafe working conditions, and lack of youth facilities or activities. Through this reflection, groups provided youth with the tools and resources to strategize and take action to address these barriers.

Civic activism provides applied vocational and leadership opportunities. Although Organizations would not describe what they do as "vocational training," many youth move towards civic activism because they have opportunities to apply themselves, extend their skills, and exercise their voice. Young people were also motivated by being paid for their time. It shows the young people that they are taking on roles and responsibilities usually reserved for adults.

When considering your goals and target populations, involving youth in organizations and promoting civic engagement is a great tool to engage hard to reach youth, identify barriers, and boost the skills of young people involved. While effectively improving the outcomes for youth, this in turn assists adult partners in reaching their goals and improving the effectiveness of organizations.

"A Guide to Legislative Advocacy for Youth with Disabilities" by the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth is a great tool for young people engaging in civic activism that would like to focus on legislative advocacy. This guide defines legislative advocacy, assists youth in identifying their representatives, and helps them set the stage and develop campaigns. This guide can be found at http://www.ncld-youth.info/Downloads/legislative_policy_guide.pdf.

Part Two: Implementation



After developing an understanding of what youth guided means and its importance, the door to having a broader understanding of the youth perspective and improving youth-guided practices is opened.

To begin implementing youth guided practices in your organization, community, and System of Care, there are many key elements and strategies. This includes understanding the different types of youth involvement, cultural and linguistic competence (including youth culture), accessibility, and strategies to sustain youth involvement. Most importantly, implementing youth guided practices calls for a shift in practices and thinking, or as described in Hart's Ladder, moving from youth as objects and recipients to viewing youth as partners.

Types of Youth Involvement in Organizations

There are many different ways youth can be involved in organizations in order to achieve meaningful youth involvement and engage in youth guide practices. As mentioned earlier in this guide, a common idea that requires a critical observation is that in order to be youth guided, a youth group must be created. Groups are only one form of youth guided practice and are only truly youth guided if the focus is determined by youth input and perspective. There is also a key difference between forming a peer support group, and forming a youth group that holds decision making power.

When considering various forms of youth involvement to engage in youth guided practice, involving youth from the beginning is ideal and forming an authentic youth-adult partnership is the key to success. Youth can be involved in all stages of organizations and programs including assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating.

Assessing and Planning

Needs Assessment: Support youth in identifying resources in their community to be uploaded into a community-wide map. This map is then used to inform community leaders about existing gaps and challenges. Individuals can also organize community forums, either facilitated in partnership or solely by youth, to discuss the needs of the community. *Visit http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=939 for more information on community resource mapping.*

Strategic Planning/Program Design & Activities: Involve youth in the development of strategic plans. It is important for young people to know the organizational goals, as well as the personal goals they set. Involving youth in strategic planning can allow them to see where they are as a group and further improve plans as you move forward. Youth can also help create activities that will be of interest to their peers in addition to participating in the design of the program.

Hiring Practices: Including youth as a member of the interview team or gathering feedback from young people on potential staff members. Gaining feedback from youth on their ongoing experiences with staff members can also help ensure all needs are being met.

Environmental Design: Gathering feedback or involving young people on the look and feel of the design of areas in which they frequent. This could include identifying what makes young people feel safe and welcome upon entering the building or instilling a sense of ownership by allowing youth to decorate “youth rooms” or similar areas.

Fundraising: Support youth in being out in the community to raise money for different projects, events, or even charities! Youth should determine their cause for fundraising and utilize this as a tool to bring awareness of their activities and purpose to other members of the community.

Implementation

Promoting Program/Activities to Other Youth and Adults: Youth should have a lead role in promoting and presenting information that they have created and/or participating in from the beginning through social marketing, outreach and engagement. This provides them with ownership of their efforts. They can also identify locations that are frequented by potential participants.

Youth/Young Adults on the Implementation Team: Having Youth Trainers or Youth Employees as a part of the staff team to provide their unique insight and expertise. Having a young person in this peer role will help build and sustain youth efforts.

Youth/Young Adults on Standing Workgroups, Committees, Taskforces, and Serving on Board of Directors: Invite youth/young adults to standing workgroups, committees, and taskforces in which young people are also stakeholders. Youth can also be invited to serve on the Board of Directors. In these groups, it is advised that at least two young people be at the table.

Youth Advisory Council: Youth Advisory Committees ensure that services and supports in the community are truly meeting the needs of young people. *See: Starting and Sustaining and Advisory Council later in Part Two for more details.*

Evaluation and Reporting Process

Quality & Ongoing Evaluation: Involve youth in the development and participations of quality and satisfaction surveys. This ensures that the evaluations are in youth friendly language and address all the needs. Providing suggestion boxes is another way to get feedback from youth. It is also important to involve youth in the overall program and outcome evaluation, as well as staff evaluation. *Youth Involvement in Evaluation will be discussed further in Part Three.*

Reporting: Organizations and programs often require various types of reporting, both internally and externally, in order to keep track of outreach and meeting goals. When youth are involved in various organizational practices, they can also further assist in reporting. For example, a county meeting attendance form was created for Rensselaer County's Youth Advisory Council, Voices of Youth Advisors, to incentivize their responsibility in attending County committee meetings as well as assisting with reporting the units of contacts. The way it was set up for this group, in order to receive a stipend for attending, each individual member must complete and attendance form that includes their name, the date of the meeting, which meeting it was, what other members were there (to avoid confusion later on), how many individuals were present (needed for reporting units of service/contacts), and their input.

This form not only assist with reporting, but also helps put responsibility on the members, reinforce skills used in typical work environments, and keeps track of which individuals receive stipends. Similar forms can be created tailored to individual needs and type of youth involvement.

County Meeting Attendance Form

Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Name of Committee Meeting: _____
_____

Number of People in Attendance: _____

VOYA Members Present (names):_____

_____

_____

Items Discussed (notes):_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Input provided (by you):_____

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Individuals typically think of cultural and linguistic competence in regards to just race and ethnicity, but culture also refers to other groups that are defined by various characteristics including age, gender, religion, income level, education, sexual orientation, disability, or profession (SAMHSA, n.d.). Cultural and linguistic competency is very complex and is about more than just a person's ethnicity.

Cultural Competence

According to the National Center for Cultural Competence, cultural competence requires that organizations:

- Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally
- Have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve
- Incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities

Cultural competence is a developmental process in which both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills that evolve over an extended period of time (adapted from Cross, T. et al, 1989).

Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is the ability of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively and in a manner that is easily understood by a diverse group of individuals. This can include individuals with limited English proficiency, those with low literacy skills, individuals with disabilities, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. In order to respond effectively to individuals they serve, there must be policy, structures, practices, procedures, and dedicated resources to support this capacity (Goode & Jones, 2009).

The guiding values and principles for language access include:

- Services and supports are delivered in the preferred language and/or mode of delivery of individuals
- Written materials are translated, adapted, and/or provided in alternative formats based on the needs and preferences of the individual
- Interpretation and translation services comply with all relevant Federal, state, and local mandates governing language access
- Consumers are engaged in evaluation of language access and other communication services to ensure for quality and satisfaction

For more information on cultural and linguistic competence, visit nccc.georgetown.edu.

Youth Culture

In order to successfully engage in youth guided practices, individuals and organizations must recognize youth culture as a component of cultural and linguistic competence. Youth culture is “the sum of the way of living of adolescents; it refers to the body of norms, values and practices recognized and shared by members of the adolescent society as appropriate guides to actions” (Rice, 1996). Youth culture can be vastly different from what adults would expect and needs to be understood and embraced in order to having meaningful youth-adult partnerships.

As seen across cultures, youth have various subcultures and vary in the ways they label themselves. This requires the use of a variety of strategies for engagement. In addition, many youth also may not feel comfortable being identified by or associated with certain labels, including “disabled,” “at risk,” “disadvantaged,” “minority,” or “gay.” Youth may also differ in being identified by race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, family structure, or language spoken at home (Reid, 2011). Since youth may not identify themselves in the way that adults and systems identify them, it is important to explore the individuality of a young person and ask open ended questions that leave the door open for exploration when engaging in outreach and other activities.

Youth bring a diverse and unique perspective to their systems of care. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that no single youth (or group of youth) speaks for all other youth who share similar characteristics. It is important to encourage youth to speak for themselves and share their perspectives and refrain from the temptation to generalize and treat all youth as if they are the same or that their age alone makes them experts on all topics pertaining to youth (Reid, 2011).

To learn more about youth culture, contact YOUTH POWER! at info@youthpowerny.org or by phone at 518-432-0333 ext. 31. You can also check out the “Integrating Youth Guided and Cultural and Linguistic Competence Values into Systems of Care” guide at http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/0782_Integrating_v4b.pdf.

Addressing Adultism

Recognizing and addressing adultism allows youth and adults to come together in an effective partnership. Adultism is a type of oppression that follows the belief that adults should have all the power to control youth, their decisions, and actions. Adult partners must be aware of their inherit privileges due to their age and work to counteract the stereotypes of what it means to be an adult and what it means to be a youth (“Understanding Adultism,” Chicago Freedom School). In doing so, adult allies are taking another step towards valuing diversity by recognizing and empowering young people and their life experiences.

In the "*Positive Youth Development 101"* Curricula, ACT for Youth Center of Excellence identified several different ways adultism can manifest, including dysfunctional rescuing, blaming the victim, avoidance of contact, denial of the distinctiveness of youth culture, and denial of the political significance of adultism. While individuals may not engage in these practices with ill-intent or be aware that they are making or acting on assumptions, it is important to be able to recognize and challenge these practices in order to engage in a positive youth development framework.

Below are the different ways in which adultism can manifest with an accompanying scenario from handout 3.3 "Framework for Understanding Adultism" in the Positive Youth Development 101 curricula. For each scenario, consider the following questions:

- How would young people react to this situation? How would they feel about it?
- What would be the long term consequences if they are repeatedly treated like this?
- What could you do differently? What would be an alternative adult response?

Dysfunctional Rescuing is when we assume that young people are not able or ready to do the task, so we take over and do it for them. For example, two young people are planning to do a presentation about a recently completed community service project at the agency's annual meeting. The day before the event the adult program leader sees that the young people are not that well prepared and decides to take over as the lead presenter.

Blaming the victim is when we assume that behavior problems are solely the responsibility of young people without considering the circumstances and conditions that influence their behavior. For example, in a work readiness program a young person is repeatedly missing sessions and appointments (he relies on his parents for transportation). The program coordinator sees the young person as irresponsible and unreliable and decides to drop him from the program.

Avoidance of contact is when we assume that we know their needs, but due to a lack of contact and communication we might create programs that address our needs more than the needs of young people. For example, an agency administrator uses new funding to start up an after-school program for teenagers. He develops the program to best for the structure of programming in his agency. Trying to maximize on space utilization, he puts the new program into a room originally designed for a nursery school.

Denial of distinctiveness of youth culture is when we assume that there are no cultural differences, leading to an age-blind approach. For example, an agency decides to have young people on their board of directors. One young person is selected and asked to be on the board. The youth is expected to attend every board meeting. The board meets once a month from 7-9PM in the agency's main office downtown.

Denial of the political significance of adultism is when we ignore the social, political, and economic realities of young people, resulting in false expectations. For example, a group of young people is planning a teen center. Two group members are charged with investigating zoning regulations and related city policies. They decide to go directly to city hall to do the research. The receptionist initially ignores them; finally she asks what they are doing there. Asking to meet with a staff person at the planning department, they are told that staff does not have time to meet with them.

When considering ways to combat adultism, start by self-reflecting and thinking back to your teen years, how you were treated by adults, and how it made you feel. In addition, ACT for Youth developed an accompanying worksheet to the above manifestations of adultism titled "3.3 Worksheet: Framework for Understanding Adultism." This worksheet assists you by utilizing your own examples and brainstorming alternate behaviors. For the full guide and handouts, visit http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/manual.cfm.

Adult Allies

An adult ally understands the value of youth feedback and works towards engaging them in decision-making processes by acknowledging youth input and validating the thoughts and feelings youth share.

Being an adult ally is:

- Engaging youth into action
- Creating learning partnerships
- Creating structural support
- Valuing each other's experiences
- Setting and supporting high standards
- Acknowledging your privilege, not denying your power

More often, we focus on training youth to become stronger advocates and do not prepare adults to better partner with youth. Utilizing a youth coordinator can assist in partnering with young people and fostering an empowering environment for all individuals involved *(Matarese, McGinnis, & Mora. "Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A Guide to Empowerment,"2005, Pg 21.)*

Understanding Ableism

In our society, we deal with a lot of "isms," such as racism, sexism, and adultism (discussed later in this section). One that often goes unaddressed is ableism. Ableism is defined as discrimination of individuals with disabilities, including developmental, emotional, physical, and psychiatric disabilities. Furthermore, it extends beyond acts, both intentional and not, and is the belief that people with disabilities "need to be fixed

"Our fight is less against willful hate and more against the easy ignorance cloaked in the privilege of never having to live a disabled experience -- the privilege of never being guilted and shamed into going to an event that you lost the spoons for but had requested an interpreter for beforehand -- the privilege of never having to decide days in advance whether you will go to an event or not -- the privilege of never having to wonder whether you'll be able to access the handouts, presentation slides, or speech of the presenter -- the privilege of not worrying whether other attendees' perfumed products will induce an allergic reaction, meltdown, or physical illness -- the privilege of not sitting on edge in case something triggers a seizure -- the privilege of not thinking about whether something will surprise you by triggering a panic, anxiety, or PTSD attack -- the privilege of not having to think about whether you can even get into the... building -- the privilege of being able to go to any event you like, anywhere, with little difficulty or inconvenience except perhaps finding parking"

-Lydia X.Z. Brown, "This is What the Empty Room Means," *2014.*

or cannot function as full members of society" and that having a disability is "a defect rather than a dimension of difference" (Zeilinger, 2015). Ableism also perpetuates the idea that young people with disabilities involved in programs cannot be meaningfully involved past being a recipient of services.

There are several different models of disability that act as a lens in which you look at people, including the medical, charity, administrative, and social models.

Medical Model: This model is based on the belief that disabled people need to be fixed and believes the source of limitations to be unconnected to the social or geographical environments. The medical model believes the lives of people with disabilities should be about finding a cure and making someone more "normal", rather than thinking about disability as a natural part of human diversity.

Charity Model: This model follows the belief that disabled people are just consumers who need help, or are objects to be pitied. This model is harmful because it shows disability one way and does not include the perspective of individuals, which creates a lot of negative stereotypes, rather than thinking of disabled people as people who deserve respect and equality like everyone else.

Administrative Model: This model defines disability as an inability to work, rather than the actual impairment and is found in government programs such as Social Security. Defining disability in such a way is harmful in that it forces people with disabilities to say they can't do things in order to receive supports. This model focuses on perceived inability instead of taking a strength-based approach to identify what supports individuals require to live and work independently.

Social Model: The Disability Rights Movement in the 1970s brought forth a new definition of disability and this model became the focus of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This model states that people with disabilities are not the problem. Instead, we must remove attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers that in turn cause discrimination. This model empowers individuals with disabilities and fosters a sense of pride in the community.

Youth with disabilities are a part of all populations and fields of work. The Social Model is the framework for the peer movement and the strength-based model needed to effectively engage youth. As mentioned in the previous section, research has shown older, more challenged youth are more likely to become civically engaged when activities turn the focus off of what is wrong with them and turn it toward what is going on in their communities. While certain models may be enforced by funding streams, it is important to incorporate social-model values into other models in order to successfully engage in youth-guided practices.

Many disability activists share their experiences with ableism through blogs and social media to highlight how even the best of intentions can be ableist at their core and not consider the perspective of the person with a disability. Below are some examples of how ableism can manifest along with real-life experiences.

Inaccessibility: A frequently addressed and important topic is accessibility. This could be in the form of physical accessibility for buildings, travel, and so on, but can also include accessible formats in collecting information, whether writing, speech, or otherwise. Society follows what is considered to be the “norm,” and in turn, often disregards the needs of all individuals simply because they do not have lived experience to perceive otherwise. This leads to barriers in accessibility for individuals with a variety of disabilities. Accommodations are vast and individuals should always consider disability accommodations just as they would consider any other needs for individuals.

Language: Ableism has been normalized into our language through the use of disability metaphors such as “my speech fell upon deaf ears,” and the everyday use of words such as “crazy” or “retarded.” While seemingly innocent or associated with the idea of being too “sensitive” or too focused on political correctness, the use of ableist language reinforces social norms that, in turn, normalize violence, abuse, and perpetuate other forms of oppression. As stated by Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg, “When critique of a language that makes reference to disability is not welcome, it is nearly inevitable that, as a disabled person, I am not welcome either.” Using respectful language when speaking to or about people with disabilities is a key component in addressing ableism.

Furthermore, it is important to consider and respect the personal preferences and ways in which individuals identify. For the purposes of the guide, we have used person first language through variations of the phrase “people with disabilities,” but that does not necessarily reflect how all people with disabilities prefer to be addressed - some individuals also prefer to use identity-first language.

Writer and activist Lydia X. Z. Brown compiled a list of ableist words and phrases along with alternatives that can be accessed at http://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html. Throughout their work, they also address other forms ableist violence and how, while language is a component, the effects are seen on a large scale and experienced on a daily basis. To read more of Lydia X.Z. Brown’s work, please visit www.autistichoya.com.

Perception: As seen through the charity model, people with disabilities are often faced with the perception that they need to be pitied or that engaging in everyday acts is inspiring and cause for applause. Furthermore, there is also often a perception that people with disabilities have no autonomy and are in constant need of help, without ever really being asked.

Writer and disability rights activist, Emily Ladau, has recounted on the impact and experiences caused by this perception. For example, in “Thanks for the Help, I Guess, But I’m not Helpless!” she described a time at the airport in which her and her mother were approached by a woman while they were sitting by their luggage, asking if they needed help. In reflection of the offer, Emily described how they were simply sitting with their luggage and did not indicate in any way that they were struggling and how strange it would have been for someone to approach an able-bodied person to do the same. The overall message she gave her readers is that “being a good person is a great thing, but please don’t do it at the expense of allowing me to determine my own needs. It’s time for able-bodied people to differentiate between politeness and infringing upon my independence.”

In another instance, recounted in “I Am More Than An Empty Wheelchair: Speaking Up Against Ableism,” Emily described a situation that occurs too frequently for members of the disability community:

“Can you move them over there?” It was such an innocent question. The woman volunteering as an usher looked at the only one in my group of friends who doesn’t use a wheelchair or a walker, hoping he would herd us, “them,” to the back of the lobby to get out of the way for other people using mobility aids. My friend doesn’t appear to have a physical disability when he’s just standing still, so the usher directed her request at him as though he was our chaperone.”

Just as it is important to address youth directly, and not to instead only address the adults, the same can be said for people with disabilities. To read more of Emily Ladau's work, please visit WordsIWheelBy.com.

Individuals with invisible (non-apparent) disabilities: When you hear the word disability, what image comes to mind? Often times, individuals think of disabilities in terms of only those which are visible. Disabilities also include those that are not always apparent, such as psychiatric, developmental, and learning disabilities. Activist and Vlogger, Annie Elainey, addressed this topic in her video "How to Spot a Fake Disability" and the notion of calling out individuals as "faking" when engaging in certain activities such as parking in a handicap spot. In her video she states, "for all you know, that person has a feeding tube underneath their t-shirt or prosthetic limbs under their clothes. They could suffer from a heart condition, fragile skin, muscles, bones, etc." When working with individuals with disabilities, it is important to recognize disabilities to be diverse and that just because it is not readily apparent, does not mean it doesn't exist.

Commonly, when providing technical assistance YP! receives comments like *"the youth in our program can't help guide our services because they are depressed and anxious."* This is an ableist assumption. Just because a young person has mental health challenges or a psychiatric disability does not make them unable to form opinions and observe issues in their services, schools, and communities. In fact, their environments could be directly impacting their mental health and it is important to engage young people in conversations to explore these factors.

Disability Etiquette

People with disabilities are entitled to the same courtesies you would extend to anyone, including personal privacy. Based on information provided by the *Institute for Educational Leadership*, below are some tips on disability etiquette:

- If you find it inappropriate to ask people about their sex lives, or their complexions, or their incomes, extend the courtesy to people with disabilities.
- If you don't make a habit of leaning or hanging on people, don't lean or hang on someone's wheelchair. Wheelchairs are an extension of personal space.
- When you offer to assist someone with a vision impairment, allow the person to take your arm. This will help you to guide, rather than propel or lead, the person.
- Treat adults as adults. Call a person by his or her first name only when you extend this familiarity to everyone present. Don't patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head. Reserve this sign of affection for children.

In conversation:

- When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to him or her, rather than through a companion who may be along.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions, such as "See you later," or "I've got to run," that seem to relate to the person's disability.
- To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not everyone with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who do will rely on facial expressions and other body language to help understand. Show consideration by facing a light source and keeping your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking. Keep mustaches well-trimmed. Shouting won't help, but written notes will help.
- When talking with a person using a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, place yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. Say, for example, "On my right is Andy Clark." When conversing in a group, remember to say the name of the person to whom you are speaking to give a vocal cue. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate when you move from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.
- Give whole, unhurried attention when you're talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting, and be patient rather than speaking for the person. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand. The person's reaction will guide you to understanding.

Common courtesies:

- If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs help before you act, and listen to any instructions the person may want to give.
- When giving directions to a person using a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.
- When directing a person with a visual impairment, use specifics such as "left a hundred feet," or "right two yards."
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get things done or said. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.
- When planning events involving persons with disabilities, consider their needs ahead of time. If an insurmountable barrier exists, let them know about it prior to the event.

Ways to Engage in Culturally Competent Practices

(adapted by the Chicago Freedom School from Lisa Fithian's document "Anti-Racism Principles and Practices.")

Personal Practices

1. Challenge yourself to be honest and open and take risks to address racism, sexism, adultism, ableism, classism, homophobia and transphobia head on
2. When you witness or experience an abuse of power or oppression, interrupt the behavior and address it on the spot or later, either one on one, or with a few allies; address oppressive behavior that will encourage change
3. Challenge the behavior, not the person. Be sensitive and promote open dialogue
4. Don't generalize feelings, thoughts, behaviors, etc. to a whole group
5. Give people the benefit of the doubt and don't make assumptions. Recognize the when someone offers criticism around oppressive behavior, to treat is as a gift that it is rather than challenging the person or invalidating their experience
6. Be willing to lose a friend but try not to "throw away" people who mess up because you don't want to be associated with them. Help them admit what they did and help them take responsibility

Organizational

1. Commit time for organizational discussions on discrimination and oppression
2. Set anti-oppression goals and continually evaluate whether or not you are meeting them
3. Promote and anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-adultism, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist message and analysis in everything you do, in and outside of activist space
4. Remember these are complex issues and they need adequate time and space.
5. Create opportunities for people to develop skills to communicate about oppression
6. Promote egalitarian group development by prioritizing skill shares and being aware of who tends to do what work, who gets recognized/supported/solicited
7. Respect different styles of leadership and communication
8. Don't push historically marginalized people to do things because of their oppressed group (tokenism); base selection on their work, experience, and skills
9. Make a collective commitment to hold people accountable for their behavior so that the organization can be a safe and nurturing place for all
10. Have recruitment materials and sessions be available in multiple languages (sign language and braille included)
11. If your organization specifically wants to recruit young people who have not yet completed high school or college, do not require long application essays and rate them based on their grammar/writing skills

12. Ensure that marginalized communities have decision-making power over finances, programming, and staffing

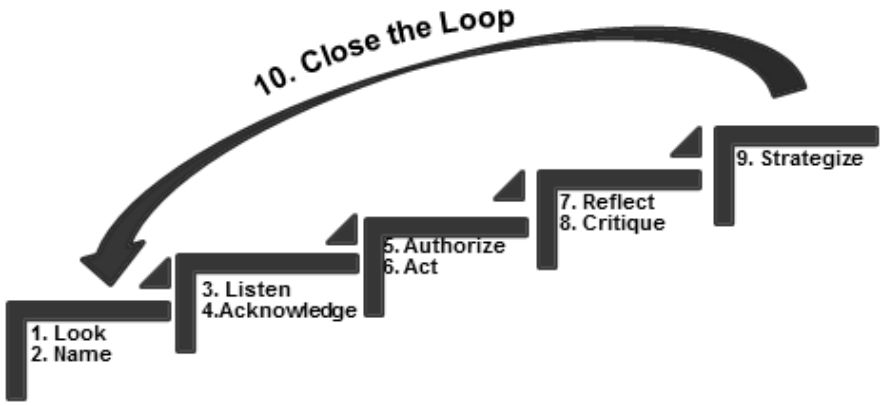
Meeting Practices

1. Facilitators ensure that the space is safe and welcoming for everyone and the responsibility of each group member to contribute to this
2. Meeting participants are good listeners and don't interrupt people who are speaking
3. Meeting participants are conscious of how your use of language may perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia, or ageism
4. Facilitators try not to call people out because they are not speaking
5. Facilitators and participants are conscious of how much space they take up or how much they speak in a group. Everyone practices "stepping up, stepping back" so each contribute to equal participation
6. Facilitators and participants are careful of not hogging the show, speaking on every subject, speaking in capital letters, restating what others say or speaking for others
7. Different views and opinions are respected
8. Race, gender and age participation is balanced
9. People who haven't spoken yet get priority
10. It is the group's responsibility to challenge racist, sexist, adultist, ableist, homophobic remarks

Best Practices

- Leave assumptions at the door – Refrain from giving too much credence to case notes. Although these may provide a history, treat this person as you would any other person you first meet. Don't let a person's history dictate your impression
- Explore the individuality of a young person. What are their interests, strengths and abilities? What will they like your help with? Let them be active partners in designing their treatment
- Be authentic ("real") and build trust; Do not promise things that cannot be delivered
- Offer information young people are interested in and in need of such as sexual education, financial literacy and independent living skills in youth friendly ways (interactive)
- Offer services and meetings at youth friendly times
- LISTEN & support
- Offer Choices
- Modeling

Ten Steps to Engage Youth



(The Freechild Project, "A Short Introduction to Youth Engagement", 2013, pg. 12.)

1. Look: Who are the specific youth you want to engage?
2. Name: What exactly do you want to engage youth in?
3. Listen: What do the young people you want to engage care about? What do they say they're sustainably connected with?
4. Acknowledge: let youth know you're listening to them by affirming, denying, or inquiring further about what they're saying.
5. Authorize: Provide active opportunities for young people to experience authority through learning and strategic positioning.
6. Act: take action with or support young people as they create change.
7. Reflect: look back strategically at youth engagement and identify new learning challenges, success, and opportunities.
8. Critique: Examine the elements, name the outcomes, determine the inequities, and actively challenge barriers.
9. Strategize: Determine new avenues for action and outcomes.
10. Close the Loop: Use the learning, critiques, and strategies you identified to strategize new opportunities for youth engagement.

Making Meetings Accessible to Youth

A component of youth guided care is meeting young people where they are. Meetings for young people who are involved with different systems will need a different tone, setting, and other factors than what is typically set for meetings among adults.

Flexible Scheduling

Young people are busier than ever. Because of this, meetings need to be scheduled carefully as not to interfere with already prioritized activities in a young person's life. You may need to schedule meetings at times you normally would not. Survey the group to

find out what time everyone is available. Oftentimes this may be in the evening or on weekends. YP! has found that young people are most often available in the evening. Additionally, youth need ample notice of meetings due to how busy they are. Another important aspect of scheduling meetings is sending out reminders to youth via email, Facebook, phone calls or text, as youth often are overwhelmed and may not remember exact dates. Be ready to edit your schedule and do work at times that you may not have before to make sure that you can get youth involved. Over time, the young members of the group can take responsibility for scheduling meetings, developing the agendas and sending out reminders.

Often times, policies prevent individuals from working at different times or flexing schedules to accommodate hosting meetings when youth are available. If this is a barrier, individuals are encouraged to get more buy-in from the organization and stakeholders by providing more information on the importance and benefits of youth involvement and the need to make meetings more accessible.

Accommodations

Aside from disability accommodations (discussed later in this section), accommodations can be used to make meetings more "youth-friendly." One accommodation that can be used for this purpose is a breakdown list of acronyms, so as not to confuse youth who have not heard certain acronyms before. Such acronyms may include the following:

CASSP: Children and Adolescent Service System Program
DOL: Department of Labor
HCBS: Home and Community Based Services
ILC: Independent Living Center
OASAS: Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services
OCFS: Office of Children and Family Services
OMH: Office of Mental Health
OPWDD: Office of Persons With Developmental Disabilities
SOC: Systems of Care
SED: State Education Department or Serious Emotional Disturbance
SPOA: Single Point of Access

It is best to consider what acronyms, jargon, and terminology will be used during a meeting or project. Create resource tools that assist young people with understanding the specific work you are asking them to engage in.

Ensure young people are clear on the roles and expectations of everyone involved and brief youth before and after the meeting as needed. Having a Youth Coordinator, Peer Advocate, or other individual available during the meeting or ensuring at least two young people are present also helps.

Keep it Slow

Fast-paced meetings are difficult for youth who may need to take their time and/or have visual/auditory processing issues. Youth-friendly meetings are slow-paced meetings.

Make Materials Simple

Another way to make things youth-friendly is to make sure materials are in plain language. To test the readability of your materials in Microsoft Word, please do the following:

Set Up Your Document (you will just need to do this once)

- Select “Spelling and Grammar”
- Select “Options” at the bottom
- Select ‘Show Readability Statistics”
- Now it is set!

To Use It:

- Complete your document
- Select “Tools”
- Then select ‘Spelling and Grammar.’ (After checking the spelling and grammar, the program will show the Readability Statistics window at the very end.)
- Your document is ready if the “Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level” is 8.0 or less. It is best to keep it lower than 8.0.

One thing to keep in mind about keeping materials simple is not to use very much jargon at first, and slowly introduce jargon as the young people learn more about Systems of Care values and practices as well as systems lingo. It is also important to remember not to speak in acronyms. If you do use an acronym, make sure to say the word first (example: The Children’s Coordinated Service Initiative, also known as CCSI, recommended that youth and young adults be at the table for all major decisions”).

Facilitate Transportation and Allow Youth to Join the Group Virtually

Transportation is a big issue for young people, especially those who cannot drive and/or cannot use public transportation. Additionally, the public transportation infrastructure in many parts of the state is inadequate or non-existent for young people and their families to travel significant distances. It is important to think about this and build in money to assist with transportation. An alternative to meeting in person is through the use of technologies such as Go-To Meeting. Google Hangouts is another alternative. If your group plans to use technology to assist in meetings, remember that not all areas of the state have high speed internet and this could create a barrier for certain members. Alternatively, free conference call lines that only require access to a phone line exist as

well. However, this is problematic if youth have limited access to the phone or if the cell phone plan has a limited amount of minutes. This can be alleviated by building in stipends for phone cards or given them access to the call through an 800 number. Additionally, check that youth have proper equipment and a quiet place to join the meeting. This is especially important for youth in residential facilities. Be sure to check the specific rules and regulations if youth are participating from within institutionalized settings.

Transportation is also largely an issue due to inadequate funding. Identify different funding or community resources that may be available to assist. It is also important to build community partnerships, obtain buy-in from leadership, and utilize transportation that may already be in place such as schools or other areas youth frequent and have easier access to.

Welcoming New Members

When starting a group, youth advisory council, or other meeting in which young people are involved, it is important to determine if these groups are by invitation, have ongoing recruitment, recruit at certain times of the year, or are open to the public. Setting this standard will make it clear for those currently involved to determine when and how to recruit.

It is also important to have a procedure in place to recognize new members and make them feel a part of the group. One way to do so is through the use of Ice Breakers. Ice breakers provide the opportunity for individuals to get to know one another and can range from beginning each meeting with a simple question all the way through larger group activities. These activities also set the tone for the group, meeting, or event and allow individuals both to be welcomed and encourage ongoing team-building and relationship development.

Disability Accommodations

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a “reasonable accommodation” is “any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.” For instance, someone on the team may have fine motor impairment and may need a note taker, assistive technology or the ability to make audio recordings of meetings. Others may need a break during long meetings if they have Attention Deficit Disorder and cannot sit still for extended periods of time. Remember that just because a disability may be invisible does not mean someone will not need accommodations. Offer options to the group, such as a ten minute break half-way through or making sure everyone knows it is okay to ask for a break. You can also use energizers to re-engage the group.

Accessibility Checklist

The National Youth Leadership and Kids As Self Advocates developed an accessibility checklist that can be used to improve accessibility. Consider the items on the following page when sharing information in order to ensure programs and services are accessible to all people.

Document Accessibility

- Does the title of your document explain what it's about?
- Did you use "Veranda" or "Arial" as a font?
- Does the title of your document explain what it's about?
- Did you use "Veranda" or "Arial" as a font?
- Did you use size 16 font on your large print public documents?
- If you use pictures or other visual images on your document, remember that too many pictures can make the page confusing to look at.
- Did you provide open space on your documents? (Remember not to crunch too much information on one page.)
- Did you use bullets or lists in your document?
- Did you use language that is easy to understand?

Language Accessibility

- Check the grade level and readability in Microsoft Word
- Be direct. Write the main ideas you want to get across
- Use one and two syllable words as much as possible
- Use common words such as "car" instead of "vehicle"
- If you need to use a complicated (hard) word, explain what it means in the same sentence

Other Things to Keep In Mind:

- Did you offer documents in alternative formats?
    - These formats can include braille, electronic, audio, laminated copies, and large print
- Did you include a cover page to outline the main points or topics in your packet? (i.e. a table of contents)
- Are you ready to describe the visuals or the words on the overhead if you are using a PowerPoint presentation?
- Did you use respectful disability language?
- Did you make your event accessible?

Accommodations for young people with disabilities:

Adults working with all youth need to accommodate individuals with disabilities. That may involve adapting the activity itself, or making available supports of various kinds. Based on information provided by the Institute for Educational Leadership, the following accommodations could be made.

While using the following information, there are a few important things to keep in mind:

1. The lists of suggested accommodations here are not exhaustive. For a more extensive list of suggestions, a review of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) website is recommended, and may be found at the following link: http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm.

2. While each situation is different, and young people themselves are the best source of information about their disabilities and useful accommodations, sometimes a young person will choose not to disclose a disability. Therefore it is important to be aware that "non-apparent" as well as "apparent" disabilities may need to be addressed with appropriate accommodations.

3. A young person may be accustomed to certain types of accommodations within the school system but not know that what worked in school may not be appropriate in the workplace and vice versa. For example, the provision of a note taker within a school system is not likely to be an appropriate expectation of accommodation in the workplace. For additional information on the differences in these areas, refer to:

    a. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. *"Advising Youth with Disabilities on Disclosure."* Available online at: http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/advising.htm.

    b. U.S. Department of Education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Resources. Available online at: http://idea.ed.gov/.

    c. U.S. Department of Labor, Disability Resources: Americans with Disabilities Act. Available online at: http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/disability/ada.htm.

4. The accommodations listed below primarily reflect situations for a young person in the workplace, but these accommodations can also be adapted by adults working with young people in a variety of settings.

Accommodations for individuals with low vision or blindness:

According to the American Foundation for the Blind (http://www.afb.org/), there are an estimated ten million people in the United States who are blind or visually impaired. The term visual impairment includes conditions ranging from the presence of good usable vision, low vision, or to the absence of any sight at all – total blindness.

Some useful accommodations include:

- Improve lighting or use low lighting
- Provide a hand/stand magnifier
- Provide a closed circuit television system
- Provide alternative optical wear, i.e., clip-on monocular or loupes; prism spectacles; binocular systems, or a hand-held monocular
- Use color acetate sheets
- Provide large-print handouts and equipment labels
- Provide computer equipped to enlarge screen characters and images or with optical character reader, voice output, Braille screen display and printer output
- Provide audio taped, Brailed or electronically formatted notes, handouts, and texts
- Provide seating near front of a room e.g. in a training or group setting
- Use verbal description to detail visual displays. For example, to describe graphs or other visual presentations, or to indicate non-verbal responses such as the number of raised hands in response to a question

Accommodations for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing:

According to the National Association of the Deaf (http://www.nad.org/), the term “deaf” refers to individuals who are not able to hear well enough to rely on hearing as a means for processing information. The term “hard of hearing” refers to individuals who have some hearing loss but are able to use hearing to communicate. The term "deaf" is used as a cultural definition. "Deaf" references a community of individuals who are deaf, and who share a common language, American Sign Language (ASL), and culture.

Some useful accommodations include:

- Provide basic sign language training
- Allow tape recording of meetings
- Provide a headset designed for people who wear hearing aids
- Provide speech recognition software
- Provide an assisted listening device (ALD)

- Place mirrors strategically around the work area to help alert the employee to the presence of customers
- Change computer auditory signals to flashes or contrast changes
- Use sign language interpreters
- Use relay operators

Accommodations for individuals with mental health challenges:

A teen's emotional health can affect how prepared they will be for school, their ability to connect with friends and family, and their ability to bounce back when faced with life's setbacks. There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, and/or social withdrawal. The Americans with Disabilities Act explicitly includes people with mental disabilities, including individuals with psychiatric disabilities.

Some useful accommodations include:

- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
- Use electronic organizers
- Offer flexible scheduling

Accommodations for individuals with mobility challenges:

There are many types of orthopedic or neuromuscular impairments that can impact mobility. These include, but are not limited to, amputation, paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Arthritis, and spinal cord injury. Mobility impairments range from lower body impairments, which may require use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, to upper body impairments which may include limited or no use of the upper extremities and hands. It is impossible to generalize about the functional abilities of youth with mobility impairments due to the wide variety of types disabilities and specific diagnoses.

Some useful accommodations include:

- Provide file drawers in a vertical file cabinet
- Provide adjustable height and tilt tables
- Place office supplies and frequently used materials on most accessible shelves or drawers for a person who cannot reach upper and lower shelves and drawers
- Arrange accessible office machines, such as copiers and faxes, so a person using a wheelchair can access them from a seated position
- Arrange for wide aisles and uncluttered work areas
- Provide computers with speech input and alternative keyboards
- Provide access to handicapped parking spaces, wheelchair ramps, curb cuts, restrooms, and elevators
- Offer flexible scheduling so a person who cannot drive can access public transportation
- Allow the person to have a personal attendant at work to assist with toileting, grooming, and eating

Accommodations for individuals with learning disabilities

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (http://www.ninds.nih.gov/), learning disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, the disorders are usually not recognized until the child reaches school age. Learning disabilities are a lifelong condition; they are not outgrown or cured, though many people develop coping techniques through special education, tutoring, medication, therapy, personal development, or adaptation of learning skills.

Some useful accommodations include:

- Provide talking calculators
- Provide verbal instructions
- Audio tape or videotape meetings
- Provide projects or detailed instructions on audiotapes or print copies
- Reinforce directions verbally
- Break large amounts of information or instructions into smaller segments
- Provide Computers equipped with speech output, which highlights and reads (via screen reading software and a speech synthesizer) text on the computer screen
- Provide word processing software that includes electronic spelling and grammar checkers, software with highlighting capabilities, and word prediction software
- Provide software to enlarge screen images
- Provide an assigned coworker to read instructions to the employee
- Provide pictures throughout the office as a reminder of procedures

Sustaining Youth Involvement

The ability to sustain youth involvement depends primarily on two factors – financial support and the philosophy being supported within the organization. There are also various barriers to youth involvement that have solutions to make youth involvement a sustainable reality.

Barriers to Youth Involvement	Solutions to Youth Involvement
Youth have ideas, but don't know how to implement them	Provide training opportunities for young people
Adults refuse to share power with young people	Educate about the power and benefits in involving youth
Adults plan projects without involving youth	Provide training for adults who will partner with young people
Adults view young people as problems rather than resources	Create opportunities for youth to train adults and providers
Youth don't view themselves as change agents	Listen to and value the suggestions of young people so they become more comfortable and competent when making suggestions
Youth are unwilling to get involved (because they have never been invited to the table before)	Use youth leaders to link with other youth in the community
Lack support for young people when they come to the table	Identify an adult mentor for youth to help in understanding meeting processes and protocols
Distrust between youth and adults	Facilitate a discussion or activity where youth and adults can learn about each other
Lack of transportation to meetings	Help youth decide how they will get to the meeting (e.g. Provide bus tokens if youth use public transportation or schedule a car pool)
Schedule of meetings	Schedule meetings after school and provide dinner if the meeting is during a meal time
Financial Constraints	Provide compensation for youth involvement (cash, vouchers, credits, community service hours)
Cultural Differences	Provide cultural competency training that includes youth and ensure services and supports are culturally appropriate and desired

(Adapted from "Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A Guide to Empowerment,"2005, Pg 47-48)

Engage Youth in Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

Peer-to-peer mentoring is a powerful tool to support and sustain youth involvement. This can include youth, young adult, and/or adult peers that have similar or relatable life experiences. By having someone they can relate to, and someone who supports and mentors those involved, youth will develop a deeper sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is a component of the Positive Youth Development framework described earlier in this guide and has a great impact on engaging youth long-term.

Creating Safe Spaces

In order to effectively sustain youth involvement, the environment must feel safe and welcoming to those involved. Creating a safe space can start by asking youth and other partners what they need to feel safe and included, what they can offer to others to feel safe and included, and what pronoun to address them with (he/him, she/her, or they/them). Identifying these responses can bring to light to everyone's individual needs and foster an inclusive, welcoming environment. Another step is creating ground rules that are identified by youth and partners when engaging in meetings and other activities. Ground rules can include ensuring everyone is treated respectfully, being strength-based and solution-focused, ensuring everyone understands what is going on, and speaking in ways that do not alienate or harm others. For example, using "I" statements such as "When I...," "I think that...," "I feel that...," can help explain issues clearly and ensure blame is not being placed on any individual. These rules can be reevaluated over time or as more individuals become involved.

Instill a Sense of Ownership

Support young people in taking ownership of their participation through providing them with a place they can make their own, support youth in creating a name for their group, placing youth in planning and advising roles, and building a sense of community among youth.

Provide Social and Personal Incentives

Incentives such as socializing, peer support, skill building, and stipends can help motivate and sustain youth involvement. Emphasize intangible rewards such as work readiness and resume building that are inherently a part of their participation and ensure they are given support as needed, such as how to list their involvement on their resume. Additionally, just as other professionals are paid for their time and expertise; provide a stipend for young people who are participating in and/or leading events, meetings, conferences or presentations. Stipends can be in the form of gift cards, gas cards, phone cards, movie passes, tickets to various forms of entertainment, and other forms of compensation. In providing these stipends, you are not only demonstrating that you value and acknowledge the youth involvement and expertise, but can also provide the foundation to address monetary barriers to youth involvement.

When providing stipends, be sure to consider their sustainability and the type of incentives young people are interested in or indicate they would most benefit from having. Depending on the type and amount of stipends received, youth may also be responsible for associated taxes and must be supported or connected to ways to understand the impact and what steps they may need to take after receiving stipends. Do not use stipends when you should be paying individuals for a part-time position.

Recognizing Youth/Celebrating Achievements

Recognizing the accomplishments of youth recruits is essential to engaging them over the long term. Youth who are praised and encouraged to feel special will be even more enthusiastic about giving input. You can try having a "recognition night" for youth, as well as running ads in the newspaper recognizing them and nominating especially devoted youth for various awards that apply to the work they have done.

If there is a privacy concern or they are unable to be photographed, be creative! Taking creative photos that hide the individual's or group members' face can allow you to still recognize and celebrate the youth while maintaining their privacy.

Preventing Burn-out

As with all individuals in a variety of fields, it is important to take steps to prevent the burnout of young people involved in leadership. It is recommended when building youth involvement to identify a core group of young people that can further assist in these efforts or hiring a young person to coordinate efforts. Always be sure to provide these individuals with the support needed to complete goals and identify areas in which either more support is needed, or assistance in troubleshooting is required.

If you have young people that are consistently and primarily involved in your youth involvement efforts, take steps to evaluate their level of responsibility to ensure they are not being overwhelmed, and identify strategies to assist when it occurs. For example, in development of The Children's Plan to improve the social and emotional well-being of New York's children and their families, youth were initially brought on to existing groups in place. These youth became overwhelmed and experienced burn-out. Rather than just eliminating the youth involvement, they instead developed a Statewide Youth Advisory Workgroup to give meaningful input into the plan that allowed them to provide the necessary input, without being spread thin and overwhelmed across various groups.

Identifying Additional Funding Sources

There are also various ways to identify funding sources to support youth involvement. Consider local, state, national, community, and corporate foundations and/or resources for funding opportunities. For example, Youth M.O.V.E. National has the Dare to Dream America funding opportunity for young people (ages 13 to 25) or youth groups to create and implement youth driven projects that promote mental health awareness and well-being. Young people who have been awarded this grant in New York State have led public forums or bi-monthly meetings for young people, sponsored youth to attend youth leadership forums, provided journals and resources to high school students, and most recently, hosting a community-wide awareness event to stomp out stigma and connect people to resources. Local newspapers, state announcements, and internet searches are ways to identify funding opportunities. Simply googling "youth led funding" yields numerous results and potential funding opportunities. Large companies and programs also often provide local programs with financial support based on priorities set by the company. Most importantly, building community partnerships with diverse stakeholders where resources can be pooled together is a critical part of sustaining youth involvement (Matarese, McGinnis, & Mora, 2005, pp. 47-48).

Starting and Sustaining a Youth Advisory Council

Youth Advisory Committees invite youth to give meaningful input into the decision-making process of child-serving systems with regards to service design, implementation, policy and practice. These committees may serve as a resource to any agency, organization or provider who serve young people and are interested in receiving feedback from youth. These committees may serve as an advisory board to a specific agency or the community as a whole.

Youth Advisory Committees ensure that services and supports in the community are truly meeting the needs of young people. Through youth councils, young people not only help to improve their community but also build their personal advocacy and leadership abilities. Youth who are involved in youth councils often speak of the empowering feeling that comes from helping their peers. Together, committee members better child and young adult serving systems and raise awareness, while generating support in the larger community.

First Steps of Starting a YAC:

One of the most important things to take into consideration when developing a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is evaluating whether or not the organization/community is truly prepared to listen to young people and take action alongside them. Youth Advisory Councils create a dialog and partnership between youth and adults; both groups must be prepared to have open communication and collaboration.

Here are some steps we recommend when developing a YAC:

1) **Evaluate your readiness**

   The very first step you should take is to truly think about why it is important to hear first-hand young people's thoughts, needs and desires with regards to the supports they receive in the community. Take the time to discuss this among your staff, administration and/or board of directors. This can be done through established meetings or as a wide initiative.

   Some questions to ask are:

   - What is it going to mean to your organization/community?
   - What is the level of commitment? Is everyone on board?
   - How comfortable is the organization with youth speaking up? Would adults feel comfortable serving on committees, workgroups, etc. with youth as equal partners at the table?
   - What will the organization do with the input you receive? Will you take action?

   Organizational readiness and youth involvement questionnaires are available to help you with this process. They will help you to identify your strengths as well as some possible barriers you may have to overcome. More information and self-assessments are located in Part Three of this guide.

   Hopefully everyone will be on the same page and it will be easy to proceed. Do not be discouraged if you discover some unforeseen barriers while going through this process. It is good to identify these issues early on and come up with a plan to address these challenges throughout the development stages.

2) **Identify some young people to help with the planning**

   We find that often a group of adults will want to start a YAC to engage youth and hear from them directly. Often, planning takes place without including young people. We recommend beginning as you mean to go on. Think about the young people you interact with. Ask them if they would be interested in helping to design something that could really impact your agency and the greater community. If you are agency administration and you do not interact with youth directly then we strongly recommend contacting all staff to help you identify young people. If that does not work hold a community forum or focus group to ask young people about how to set up the YAC to be as "youth friendly," appealing and effective as possible. You may find several youth at that meeting that would like to join the planning committee.

3) **Start a planning committee**

The first two steps are your preliminary planning phases. Once you complete those you will be ready to start your planning for the actual YAC. Planning topics include a purpose statement, membership recruitment and selection, and the first meeting schedule. Get together a group of people to do all of the logistical work. This group should be made up of youth and adults but it should be driven by the youth. Remember that you want to leave flexibility for the YAC to prioritize their own work and set meeting dates and times that work best for them.

Purpose:

Youth Advisory Councils typically meet to provide feedback on particular issues as requested by the organization or community. The group can also take on their own projects that help to achieve greater awareness and systems change.

It is important for your planning committee to define what it is you are forming the group to do so that when you begin recruitment, the young people know what they are signing up for. You may choose to write a purpose statement or list out the specific things you would like the council to take on. It should be in language youth will be able to understand and relate to. Try to avoid systems buzz terms that might not be in a young person's vocabulary. Mission and vision statements can be written by the YAC after formation.

How to Recruit: Application Process:

Finding young people in the community that would like to participate in a YAC is not always easy. It takes grassroots promotion to make it happen. This means you have to make sure your information gets in the hands of youth and is written in such a way that it is appealing to them.

Flyer and Application:

Often a flyer is designed to grab attention and quickly summarize what the YAC will be all about. The first time you recruit you might want to promote it as something new. The youth coming on board will get to design something that can really make a difference in the community. Make sure the young people on you planning committee take the lead or design the flyer. They are the experts on what appeals to other young people. You can then attach an application form that the young person should fill out themselves or with assistance. It is very important that the young person go through the application process themselves and that it is not done for them. Again, having young people on your planning team will ensure that everything you are asking for is understandable and not so overwhelming that no one will fill it out.

You may want to leave the application general and follow up with interviews. This may mean asking a few questions about location and age. Then follow up with short answer and/or essay questions. We find that this is the best way to gage the interest of the young person. Don't go by length of the response but rather the conviction by which it is delivered. We have received one sentence responses that say it all. There is nothing wrong with responses being short and to the point. If you choose, you can follow up with questions in the interview process.

Distribution & Promotion:

Sending out announcements over list-serves and mailing lists is important but it is best not to rely solely on them for distribution. Often these announcements do not leave the desk of the adult you sent it to. Whenever possible ask the youth on your planning committee to attend community youth groups and talk directly to youth about the YAC. We find that direct peer outreach is the best way to get more youth interested.

In the same way, if you are an adult on the planning committee and you want some of your colleagues and peers to spread the word to youth they work with give them a call and follow up on the announcement you sent them. It lets them know that this is something that is truly important and should not be put off. In the past, members of YOUTH POWER! have gotten commissioners of county agencies to write a cover letter which helps grab the attention of adult workers.

Electronic versions are also an important tool for spreading the word to youth. Formatting your flyer so that it can be posted on message boards, blogs, Facebook, etc. is a good idea.

Composition of the YAC:

When selecting the youth who will serve on the YAC it is important to take into account diversity, age and vested interest. You want to have a team that fully represents the youth you serve.

Diversity of committee:

A diverse membership population is needed to have an efficient and effective youth council. Members should come from all geographic areas of the community you serve and come from different economic backgrounds and experiences. It is also important to have a YAC that is culturally competent and is comprised of members that have diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.

Age Range:

It is essential that the youth committee be made up of youth. For committees that are strictly talking about children's services your age range should be close to 14-20 years old. If the YAC's purpose is to provide input into the transition to adulthood you may want to go to age 25. At no time should the members of the committee be older than 25.

Vested Interest:

If the YAC is being formed to give input on a specific topic or service then it is important to make sure that the members you select have personal experience in this area. For example, if you are an organization that serves people with disabilities and are looking for input regarding the services you deliver, then your YAC should be comprised of youth who have diverse disabilities.

Paid vs. Unpaid:

Many organizations have decided to pay members of a YAC for their time and expertise. Each member is given a stipend for their time. This is not a requirement of a YAC. Within the youth movement there is some debate around this. We feel that it is important to pay us for work we do because we act as consultants. However, many of us do this work because we believe in it and we feel it is necessary. It is volunteer work that helps our community while building personal leadership skills. If you have the budget that allows for the youth to be paid then you should pay them. If not, it should be a goal to increase your budget for youth involvement so that in the near future you are able to pay youth for their time and efforts.

Supporting and Sustaining the YAC

(Source: "Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth," 2007, pg. 26-33.)

Once you have built a solid foundation for the YAC, it is important to continue to provide ongoing support to youth and adult partners and continue exploring opportunities to sustain the council.

Provide Ongoing Training and Support:

Training youth council members and the adults who work with them is a crucial part of maintaining a successful YAC. Youth will need training to understand policy issues, how to work with policy makers, and how to navigate the policy making process. It is also important to train the adult stuff in policy making or youth development in support of the YAC. These trainings can be incorporated into retreats, summer leadership camps, and quarterly meetings. Often times, councils will collaborate with nonprofit agencies, policy advocacy groups, and event legislators to provide the trainings.

Some trainings that would be useful are:

- Policy training for youth council members on all aspects of the policy-making process
- Legislative advocacy strategies
- Communications skills for various audiences (policy makers, the media, the broader public, etc.)
- Research skills (topic research, basic statistics and data analysis, survey development)
- Interviewing and focus group skills
- Networking and collaboration
- Community mobilization and youth outreach strategies
- Team-building and teamwork skills
- Project and time management

Negotiate Opportunities for Access:

In order to continue and expand opportunities for the YAC, individuals should arrange authentic access to policy makers, create a visible public presence, and facilitate connections to youth constituents. Authentic access to policy makers can be arranged by creating shared leadership opportunities between council members and policy makers, bringing members into the policy making process, hiring a youth liaison, and facilitating concrete opportunities for the youth council to advise top officials. In order to create a visible public presence, develop a communications plan for the council and facilitate opportunities for youth council members to testify at public hearings. Lastly, to facilitate connections to youth constituents, be intentional about creating a "ripple effect," convene the broader community of youth to discuss their issues and develop a policy agenda, connect the broader community of youth to resources and information, and link with other youth engagement strategies. For more information on negotiating opportunities for access, view " *Building Effective Youth Councils – A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*," published by The Forum for Youth Investment.

Keep in mind that change will be slow and incremental, even for the most effective youth council. Continuing the process of support, training, expanding opportunities, and recruiting when necessary are key components to sustaining a Youth Advisory Council.

How to Get Buy-In from Partners & Leadership

A primary barrier in building, improving, and expanding youth guided practice is obtaining buy-in from partners and leadership. Below are some key points to address with partners and leadership, as well as some strategies to assist individuals in obtaining buy-in.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) requires System of Care communities to be Youth Guided. The Systems of Care framework is a philosophy and coordinated network of services and supports that are organized to meet the needs of youth and their families. This cross-system partnership incorporates values such as; Family Driven, Youth Guided, Community-Based, and Cultural and Linguistic Competence. SAHMSA requires System of Care Communities to be youth-guided as a value of System of Care.

Refer to the benefits addressed in Part One of this guide. Adults, organizations, policymakers, communities, families, and youth all benefit from youth involvement and youth guided practices. For a quick-sheet on the various benefits of youth involvement, refer to "Who Benefits from Youth Involvement?" in Part One of this guide. Additionally, a study on the impacts of youth on adults and organizations also identified different contributions that could be utilized as talking points when addressing what youth bring to effective decision making (Zeldin et al., 2000). These include:

- **Youth bring under-represented groups into organizational decision-making** – Who knows better what young people want and need than young people themselves? Youth have an inside perspective into organizational programs and are best positioned to understand the interests and concerns of young people.

- **Youth bring a fresh perspective** – Organizational mastery includes a continuous clarification of what is important and continuous learning to see current reality more clearly. Youth are less afraid than adults to challenge existing organizational processes and culture, and they seem to be less inhibited by social norms. With their high energy and ability to bring new ideas from a different vantage point, youth are more adept to challenge the idea of "we have always done it this way," a critical component in effective organizational decision-making.

- **Young people help build relationships within the organization** – Young people often bring a sense of community and energy to the decision-making process. Many individuals report that they would not be able to sustain participation if the meetings were boring and without clear purpose and excitement. Young people come to the table to work hard, contribute their

knowledge and skill, and to see their friends and to form relationships with adults. When these relationships are formed, the members create a shared identity that leads to a willingness to fully discuss the pros and cons of issues, and to reach a consensus.

- **Including youth as decision makers can be more appealing to potential funders** – Youth are powerful spokespeople when requesting money from funders. Funders are not accustomed to hearing directly from youth, so young people can make a strong impression. Buying-in to the youth guided approach and having meaningful youth involvement in decision-making has the potential to not only improve programs, but assist in receiving additional funding as you move forward.

Demonstrate to partners why youth voice is important and powerful. In order to truly understand and appreciate the contribution of young people, they need to see that youth can be competent and contribute to the organization. Observing and interacting with youth can lead to the change of attitude needed in order for individuals to buy-in to the process. Youth have noted that "adult attitude change occurs most readily when the young people are able to succeed and perform in the boardroom or in places that adults perceive as their turf." These interactions should be goal-oriented and purposeful, and have meaningful consequences. Observing positive youth action in the community with opportunities for discussion and reflection is another possible way to promote partner and leadership buy-in (Zeldin et al., 2000, pg. 47).

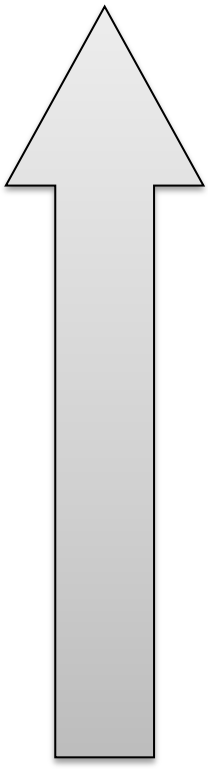
County Example: **What Helps What Harms (Westchester County, NY)**
In 1992, Westchester County and Family Ties, a family support group, wanted to learn about young people's concerns and experiences in the system. As a result, a group of youth that had been through many services and levels of care developed What Helps/What Harms, an educational document that looked at all aspects of their lives. By 1993, this group presented What Helps/What Harms to the local Westchester CCSI conference for family members, providers and administrators. This group of youth asked the county for money to continue to meet, and Westchester Youth Forum was formed. In 1999, Westchester County received a National SAMHSA grant to develop a system of care. Through this grant, Youth Forum was able to expand and advise on a federal level.
To learn more about the initiative, and the pillars for What Helps What Harms, visit the Youth M.O.V.E. National website or view the national document through this link:
http://www.youthmovenational.org/images/downloads/WHWHNationalFINAL.pdf.

Encourage youth to share their stories. Sharing stories is a powerful tool both in spreading hope, and advocating for change. When youth share their stories they are presented with the opportunity to not only share their experiences, but solutions as well. Always be sure youth a prepared to share their stories through Strategic Sharing techniques and ensuring they have a plan in place in the event they are triggered from a traumatic experience. For more information on Strategic Sharing check the resources section of this guidebook.

Utilize county examples and success stories. Often times, we turn to other counties and success stories to create ideas and strategies to improve various systems and programs. This same strategy can be used by identifying county examples and youth-guided success stories in order to demonstrate how this has worked in other areas and can be reflected within your community. NYS Success has collected various county success stories within New York State that can be found at nyssuccess.org. You can also turn to examples from other states or various partners in the youth movement and their practices/successes. Need assistance finding a examples relating to a certain project, practice, or otherwise? Contact YOUTH POWER! via info@youthpowerny.org.

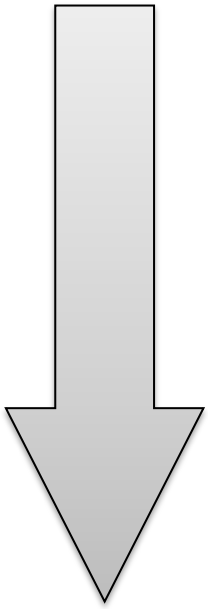
The Do's and Don'ts of Youth Guided Practice

As discussed throughout this guide, it is important to value and utilize young peoples' experiences and partnerships. Read below for some key do's and don'ts of youth guided practice.



Do's

• DO understand that Youth Guided Care (YGC) is not the same things as youth involvement.
• DO have more than one youth present during planning for YGC, meetings, events, panels, etc.
• DO provide youth with training.
• DO allow youth to conduct trainings for staff on YGC.
• DO allow youth use their lived experience to help themselves, peers, and staff.
• DO give youth time to reflect on and process what is happening and why they are acting that way when they are struggling – give them time to use their coping skills, and to think about how they can handle the situation, instead of just jumping to a punishment or decision for them.
• DO train staff on how to be truly culturally and linguistically competent.
• DO hire staff/workers with passion. Change the culture – allow youth to help in hiring processes and to hire peer advocates.
• DO understand youth culture as a whole.
• DO – when setting up a Youth Advisory Council – make sure there is a line of communication between the Council and decision makers (e.g. the Board of Directors).
• DO make sure staff feel empowered about youth guided care to create an environment to empower others – make sure all staff are on board and understand the "What's" and "Why's" of YGC.



Don'ts

• DON'T address adults instead of youth (e.g. thanking staff for bringing youth without thanking youth for being there; telling staff to make sure "their youth" are "being behaved and respectful" during an event – be sure to address youth themselves).
• DON'T create a setting that limits the opportunity for choice and expression (this is a natural and vital part of the developmental process).
• DON'T allow funding/politics to keep you from moving towards YGC.
• DON'T get discouraged about the time and effort it takes to truly become Youth Guided – we know it does not happen overnight.
• DON'T forget to ask youth to help you to become more Youth Guided.
• DON'T get offensive/defensive when youth voices their opinion about services.
• DON'T underestimate the power youth voice holds.
• DON'T be afraid of change – or it will never happen.
• DON'T judge youth on a diagnosis and their "chart".
• DON'T only involve youth in the small decisions (tokenism); use their voices to make bigger changes.

(Developed by YOUTH POWER! for the "NYS Success Research Brief: Youth Guided Care")

Part Three: Evaluation & Self-Assessments

Evaluations and self-assessments are great tools for determining quality/satisfaction, program outcomes and performance, and identifying your current level of youth involvement and ways to improve youth guided practices. Partnering with youth in these efforts allow you to not only gain important information for organizations and communities, but also empower youth.

This involvement also continues Positive Youth Development practices and completes the cycle of youth involvement. Young people are powerful sources of information. Similar to creating a Youth Advisory Council, it is important to be clear about how these findings will be used and the level of change you are able to make in response to the findings, and always provide feedback regarding how this information is later utilized.

Gathering and Utilizing Feedback

Effective programs, events, and activities all use participant feedback as a tool for evaluation and future improvement. Some ways in which you can gather feedback from young people include suggestion boxes, surveys/evaluation forms, hosting focus groups or forums, and conducting interviews.

Suggestion Boxes: At the simplest level, they can be made available for young people to provide feedback and suggestions. While this practice does not necessarily encompass being youth guided, it is a first step and provides a foundation to begin gathering feedback from individuals and open doors to potential information you may want to gather when collecting feedback in larger scales. Though disconnected in its form of collection, it also creates a way for individuals to provide suggestions who may not wish to engage directly.

Surveys/Evaluations: Surveys regarding a specific issue or topic can be used to gather feedback and input. Additionally, evaluations following certain events or programs and be utilized to determine satisfaction and areas for improvement. As with all areas of communicating with youth, it is important to ensure surveys and evaluation forms are in youth friendly language.

Hosting Focus Groups/Forums: Focus groups are conducted to gather feedback from youth to inform program development and program improvement and policy. This group is typically led by individuals who are outside of the programs in which the youth are involved, and asked questions regarding a specific issue or topic area. Staff who supervise the youth are not in the room in order to allow young people to speak freely and honestly.

Conducting Interviews: Interviews allow individuals to speak one on one with participants and typically have a set of questions to be asked, while also allowing room for follow-up to elaborate as needed. Interviews can be time consuming and are best conducted with smaller groups of participants.

Youth Involvement in Program Evaluation

Youth can partner with adults through five phases of assessment and program evaluation. This includes (1) planning and preparing the assessment, (2) collecting and compiling data, (3) analyzing and understanding the data, (4) sharing results with the group, and (5) creating an action plan and finalizing reports (Powers & Tiffany, 2006).

According to Powers and Tiffany (2006), to successfully involve youth in research, the following considerations need to be made:

- All researchers need time to learn, practice, and improve. Participatory research (in this case, involving youth in the research team) is ideal for this kind of learning and well suited to engage adolescents
- The timeframe needs to be realistic – long enough for the development, testing, and revision of new skills, but not so long that young people are unable to see it through because of their own developmental changes
- The work of youth researchers needs to be supported with appropriate human, financial, and logistical resources
- Young people need to be engaged in and informed about the rights and responsibilities involved in “human subjects” research, including confidentiality concerns
- Organizations involving youth in research in research and evaluation need to take youth voice seriously by listening to and acting upon youth recommendations. At the same time, youth recommendations should not be endorsed uncritically – the reflection and decision process involving youth-generated recommendations need to be no less rigorous than recommendations by adults and partners.
- Multiple modes of participation are important. A wide range of youth (not just the youth who are “stars”) should be engaged, and youth should have the opportunity to adapt their level of participation to their changing developmental

needs. It is important to provide incentives or pathways to “ramping up” participation and assuming increasingly complex responsibilities, as well as ways for youth to reduce their involvement, while maintaining significant relationships with the project, as their developmental needs change

For more in depth examples on the different ways youth can participate in research and evaluation, view *Engaging Youth in Participatory Research and Evaluation* by Jane Powers and Jennifer Tiffany. This document can be accessed via: http://www.planaheadnewyork.com/community/youth/development/docs/jphmp_s079-s087.pdf

Program Evaluation Basics, a guide created by Camille Barnes through the NYS Success Systems of Care Expansion Grant, is a helpful tool that provides information on planning evaluation, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting data, presenting findings, and more. This document can be access via: http://nyssuccess.org/evaluation-resources/.

Organizational and Self-Assessment

According to the Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool, there are five important questions to consider when performing a self-assessment: *What is our mission? Who is our customer? What does the customer value? What are our results? What is our plan?* Throughout the process of self-assessment, individuals should also consider not only what the mission is, but what the mission should be (Drucker, 1999).

What is our mission?

When assessing your mission, consider answering the following questions; what is the current mission? What are our challenges? What are our opportunities? Does the mission need to be revisited? Essentially, your mission statement should be short and describe why you do what you do, and not how you do it. Having a broad description allows everyone in the organization or group to be able to identify how they are contributing to the mission.

Who is our customer?

While a variety of terms are used, and ‘customer’ may not be the term used to describe the individuals you serve, this question is essentially asking “who must be satisfied for the organization to achieve results?” When answering this question, consider who your primary and supporting customers are, and how they will change. Identifying the individuals you serve allows you to determine what they value, define your results, and develop your plan.

What does the customer value?

This question, though often not asked, may be the most important. This question has you explore not only what they value, but what knowledge you need to gain from them, and identifying how you will participate in gaining this knowledge. When working with youth, this is where you work to see their perspective, rather than making assumptions based on your own interpretation.

What are our results?

In order to know your results, they must first be defined. This question can be answered by asking; how do we define results? Are we successful? How should we define results? What must we strengthen or abandon?

What is our plan?

In the final question, Drucker's guide challenges you to consider whether the mission should be changed, and identifying your goals. This final step in the self-assessment brings together the mission, vision, goals, objectives, action steps, budget, and appraisal to either affirm or change the mission and set long-term goals. Drucker identified five elements of an effective plan.

Abandonment: Identifying what does not work and what has never worked. Ask any program, system, etc., "If we were not committed to this today, would we go into it?"

Concentration: According to Drucker, "Concentration is building on success, strengthening what does work." When you are performing strongly in an area, ask if it is possible to set a higher standard.

Innovation: Identify opportunities, new conditions, and emerging issues. Ask if these fit your organization or program and identify what it would require and how you can make a difference.

Risk Taking: As with all plans, there are often risks to take, and risks to avoid. Evaluate decisions and take risk when needed.

Analysis: Lasting, it is important to recognize when you do not know, when you are not sure if you should abandon, and concentrate, go into something new, or take a risk. When this occurs, conduct an analysis before making the decision.

Reevaluating Over Time

Self-assessments are an ongoing process and it is important to never really be satisfied. By consistently reevaluating over time, you are able to monitor progress, measure results, adjust plans when needed, and resharpen and refocus your goals and plans.

The Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool participant workbook by Peter F. Drucker contains various worksheets to assist in answering these questions and is available for purchase online.

Youth Participation and Engagement Indicators

The New York State Afterschool Network developed a program quality self-assessment tool that includes indicators of youth participation and engagement. This assessment considers ten indicators. These indicators include:

1. Engages participants with a variety of strategies
2. Has participants who take ownership of program selection and development
3. Enables participants to develop life skills, resiliency, and self-esteem via activities
4. Affords participants opportunities to express their ideas, concerns, and opinions
5. Enables participants to explore resources and issues in their community through projects and activities
6. Promotes consistent and active participation
7. Promotes teamwork and respect for others
8. Involves participants in the development of disciplinary practices
9. Encourages participants to recruit others into the program
10. Allows participants to be meaningfully involved in program planning, implementation, data collection, and evaluation

Coinciding with these indicators, there are different performance levels that describe, in detail, the type of activities that would occur within each indicator on a scale of one to four, with four being the highest level of performance.

For example, the fourth performance level of “Engages participants with a variety of strategies” includes:

> *“Young people are trained as facilitators and co-lead activities with staff. Community meetings or check-ins are used to publicly acknowledge youth for their contributions and accomplishments. All young people are practicing leadership skills. All young people are consulted on program decisions, actively listen to their peers and staff, have a variety of meaningful choices to make, and contribute opinions, ideas, and concerns. Young people collaboratively develop and collect data or information about the program with adults. Young people are involved in recruitment and make presentations in neighborhood schools or organizations.”*

This tool and its indicators are available online via http://www.nysan.org/quality-self-assessment-tool/elements-program-quality/youth-participation-engagement/.

Youth Involvement Questionnaire

Instructions: For each of the following statements, choose the number that best describes the agency at the current moment. Base your score on your own perceptions and experience at this point in time. Use the “Not Sure” category only if you have no basis to make a response. Mark your answer in front of each question.

1= Totally Disagree, 2= Partially Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4= Partially Agree, 5= Totally Agree

— The agency’s mission statement and goals reflect the intent to empower, support and strengthen youth.

— The agency’s administrators request input from youth in developing the agency’s mission statement and goals.

— The agency’s administrators develop specific plans that support and strengthen youth.

— The agency’s administrators organize opportunities to have direct contact with clients.

— The agency’s mission statement and goals reflect a commitment to a strength focused treatment perspective as a valuable part of the therapeutic process.

— The management staff supports and implements the agency’s goals and strategies to support and empower youth.

— The agency provides opportunities and further training for incorporating clients with skills and interest into agency operations.

— The agency administrator regularly reviews the agency’s performance in regard to youth involvement and empowerment.

— The agency’s policy and procedure manual includes references to youth empowerment.

— The agency has a clear process for evaluating the short-term and long-term impact of its programs and policies on youth.

1= Totally Disagree, 2= Partially Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4= Partially Agree, 5= Totally Agree

— The agency invites youth to participate in all aspects of program development.
— The agency develops strategies to redirect the agency's culture to one that supports and involves youth.

— The agency's administrators include youth in the policy and procedure development process.

— The agency's administrators include youth in the major and routine decision-making process.

— The agency involves youth in recruiting, orienting and training new staff'.

— The agency provides ongoing staff training, retraining and educational opportunities on issues related to youth empowerment.

— Training opportunities at the agency include the youth perspective.

— The agency involves youth in the development and review of its published literature, including its web page.

— All written materials or communications with youth use youth-friendly language.

— The agency's written policies, procedures and service delivery are culturally competent and respect differences of ethnicity, religion, class and gender.

— Agency staff discusses with youth the findings of diagnostic assessments.

— Agency staff involve the youth in case plan development.

— Agency staff ask youth who their important community partners are, and include those partners in treatment plan development.

— Treatment plans include goals developed by the youth.

— Identifying strengths of the youth is a regular part of admission, assessment and treatment planning.

— Agency staff empower youth by building on their strengths and their informal support networks.

1= Totally Disagree, 2= Partially Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4= Partially Agree, 5= Totally Agree

— Agency staff are honest and open with youth, explaining their concerns and the options that are being considered.

— The agency involves the youth in developing a crisis plan.

— The agency establishes and maintains links with community resources in the youth's home or future placement community.

— The agency affords youth the opportunity to participate in activities or engage resources in the immediate community, e.g., leisure, sports, spiritual and religious.

— The agency has a clearly written strategy for advocacy activities on behalf of youth and assigns responsibility to specific staff for implementation of these activities.

— The agency is involved in efforts to advocate for programs, policies, and services that empower youth.

— The agency invites youth with experience in treatment programs and advocacy to serve on its task forces, special committees and other advisory bodies.

— The agency evaluates outcomes for youth.

— Program evaluation materials are developed with youth input.

— Youth are surveyed regularly about their satisfaction with services.

— The agency has a formal procedure for youth to provide suggestions to administrators for program improvements.

— Agency staff are comfortable with involving youth in program decisions.

— Youth are included in most agency meetings regarding program issues.

— The agency teaches advocacy skills to youth.

— The agency provides support for youth to advocate for themselves within its programs.

— The agency provides support for youth to advocate for themselves with other community resources.

— The agency publicly recognizes and celebrates advocacy achievements of youth.

— The agency includes the youth's input in assessing the level and quality of service delivery

— The agency conducts exit interviews with each youth.

_____ Total

Scores:
225 Highest
135-180 Right Path
90-135 More Training
45-90 Assess Philosophy

This questionnaire can be downloaded at: http://fredla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/YouthInvolvementQuestionnaire.pdf

Organizational Assessment Checklist

Youth on Board developed a checklist based on their publication, 15 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision-Making. For more information on this publication or to download the checklist, please visit www.youthonboard.org. This checklist is to be used as a guide to help give direction, uncover hidden issues, clarify tasks, and guide commitment to involving youth in decision-making. Use it as a tool with your board, your staff, young people, or other people who are participating.

YES = We do this already and don't need assistance
NO = We don't do this yet and want to develop next steps to move forward in this area
N/A = This is not applicable to us / We don't plan to do this

Please note that it is not suggested that every organization meet all of these criteria.

Point 1: Define Decision-Making

Have you clearly identified the ways young people can be involved in your organization's decision-making process?
Yes No N/A

Do you know which decisions you want young people to be involved in?
Yes No N/A

Have you considered how your organization will make decisions with young people?
Yes No N/A

Point 2: Know Why You Want to Involve Young People

Do you know how youth involvement can benefit youth, adults, and your organization?
Yes No N/A

Do you know how your motivations affect youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Does your organization have a clear vision, goals, and objectives for youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Point 3: Assess Your Organization

Do you know how to build support for youth involvement in your group?
Yes No N/A

Is everyone (board members, staff members, administrators, teachers, and young people) in your organization committed to successful youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Point 4: Determine Your Approach

Is your group going to add youth representatives to an existing all-adult decision-making group?
Yes No N/A

Will your organization involve equal numbers of youth and adults in decision-making?
Yes No N/A

Do you know if an “all youth” or “youth-adult” structure will work best for your agency?
Yes No N/A

Point 5: Overcome Organizational Barriers

Are there permanent policies in your organization that support youth involvement in decision-making?
Yes No N/A

Has your organization or school addressed budget and staff issues related to youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Are the terms of office and voting rights equal for young people and adults?
Yes No N/A

Point 6: Overcome Personal Barriers

Are young people involved in all issues, not just those that affect youth?
Yes No N/A

Have adults throughout your agency examined their own stereotypes about young people?
Yes No N/A

Are young people engaged as decision-makers throughout the organization?
Yes No N/A

Point 7: Address Legal Issues

Is your organization aware of the legal responsibilities of involving youth as decision-makers?
Yes No N/A

Does your state have laws that restrict youth involvement in decision-making?
Yes No N/A

Have you explored all the legal options for formalized youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Point 8: Recruit Young People
Does your group have successful recruitment criteria?
Yes No N/A

Do your decision-making activities attract a diverse group of young people?
Yes No N/A

Does your recruitment process educate others about youth involvement in decision-making?
Yes No N/A

Point 9: Create a Strong Orientation Process
Do you have an orientation process for young decision-makers?
Yes No N/A

Has an adult explained youth involvement to parents?
Yes No N/A

Is there a system in your organization to help young people understand their involvement, as well as the roles they will serve?
Yes No N/A

Point 10: Develop Young Leaders
Do you have a peer training system for young decision-makers?
Yes No N/A

Are there opportunities for young people to develop their decision-making skills?
Yes No N/A

Do you offer a system of support for adult allies?
Yes No N/A

Point 11: Provide Intergenerational Training
Is there a formal training process for adults committed to youth involvement?
Yes No N/A

Do trainings meet the needs of youth and adults?
Yes No N/A

Does your organization's culture embrace diverse training interests, needs, and approaches?
Yes No N/A

Point 12: Facilitate Successful Meetings

Do you use techniques that engage youth and adults throughout meetings?
Yes No N/A

Are there opportunities for all members to speak at meetings?
Yes No N/A

Do you encourage personal and group appreciation during meetings?
Yes No N/A

Point 13: Foster Youth/Adult Partnerships

Are there multiple strategies and opportunities for youth and adults to build relationships?
Yes No N/A

Do you involve parents from the start?
Yes No N/A

Point 14: Develop a Mentoring Plan

Do you encourage personal success for youth involved in decision-making?
Yes No N/A

Is there an empowered, accountable resource person committed to helping youth and adults build relationships?
Yes No N/A

Do young people have substantive connections with adult leaders in the organization?
Yes No N/A

Point 15: Sustain Youth Involvement

Are there reflection opportunities infused throughout activities for young peopleand adults?
Yes No N/A

Do you evaluate youth involvement activities?
Yes No N/A

Do you have ways of recognizing success and appreciating people?
Yes No N/A

Youth Guided Resources

YOUTH M.O.V.E. – A youth led national organization that works as a diverse collective to unite the voices and causes of youth while raising awareness around youth issues. We will advocate for youth rights and voice in mental health and the other systems that serve them, for the purpose of empowering youth to be equal partners in the process of change. They include many resources and opportunities for involvement.
http://www.youthmovenational.org/

Strategic Sharing Workbook: Youth Voice in Advocacy - A workbook developed to guide individuals who have experienced traumatic life experiences and are interested in sharing their stories in an effort to promote change. This can be used by individual youths or adult allies working with youth or youth groups.
http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf

Youth Involvement in Systems of Care: A Guide to Empowerment
http://www.azdhs.gov/bhs/children/pdf/FROs/FROYouthInvolvement.pdf

Integrating "Youth Guided" and "Cultural Linguistic Competence" Values into Systems of Care
http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/0782_Integrating_v4b.pdf

Youth Adult Partnerships in Systems of Care
http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/Youth%20Adult%20Partnerships%20Guide.pdf

The 40 Developmental Assets
http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18

Circle of Courage
https://www.reclaiming.com/content/aboutcircleofcourage

For more information on the NYS Success collaborative network, success stories, and resources, please visit www.nyssuccess.org.

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