

# Making It Work

## A Guide to Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships

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## About This Guide...

As many of us know from personal and professional experience, forming beneficial partnerships is often a challenge — even when all of the goals between the partners are well matched. This guide is designed to help you analyze your ideas about partnerships, specifically partnerships between young people and adults.

The concept of partnering WITH youth most likely represents a fundamental shift in our relationships with young people. No longer are they the clients we work “at” — they become full and active participants in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services. They are full partners that bring fresh perspectives, energy and talents to the table.

This guide will highlight the many ways that youth and adults can become partners, the levels of partnerships, and what it takes to form and sustain these partnerships.



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# The Fundamentals of Youth-Adult Partnerships

A true partnership exists when each person has the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions, and when everyone's contribution is recognized and valued. A youth-adult partnership exists when adults see young people as full partners on issues facing youth and the programs and policies that affect youth.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that does not give young people many opportunities to make their own decisions. The idea that children should be seen and not heard is still common for many adults. Add to this the media's representation of young people as criminals, slackers, selfish and disinterested — with this much bad press, it's no wonder that young people are underutilized!

You will discover (if you haven't already) that when given a proper forum, today's young people are full of ideas and energy to make positive change in their communities, schools and families. As the accepted "leaders" in society, it is often up to adults to create these opportunities for young people to show their talents and concern for their society.

If these opportunities are merely for show, young people will know it because they are looking for genuine ways to contribute. Tokenism is a level of youth involvement, but it holds very little purpose or meaning for those involved.

To be effective partners, adults must respect and have confidence in youth. If they are truly sharing the power

to make decisions with young people, it means adults are letting go of their traditional roles, listening rather than telling, and working with, rather than for youth. Giving young people the authority to make decisions and a platform to share their opinions is a way to show respect.

All parties involved must be adequately prepared before entering into youth-adult partnerships. This often means that youth and adults must let go of their stereotypes about one another. Furthermore, youth-serving organizations must embrace the notion that their programs are accountable to young people. Not getting the input of young people about a youth program is like launching a new soap product without testing it to see if it cleans! Programs cannot be fully effective without the ideas and energies of the intended audience.

While there is little research on the benefits of youth-adult partnerships, there is evidence that these relationships help bolster a young person's protective factors, including mastery, compassion and health. Research also supports the notion that young people are more resilient when they feel like they have an impact on their own lives, the environment and on others.

To establish reasonable expectations, adults should consider a young partner's assets, what they will contribute to the partnership, and their willingness to mentor and train youth when the youth needs it.

So, why do organizations and programs decide to form youth-adult partnerships? The following is a list of some of the reasons; do you have others?

- 🔍 To obtain a youthful perspective, especially because it differs from that of an adult's
- 🔍 To create diversity within a decision-making group
- 🔍 To fulfill a sense of responsibility about providing young people with opportunities to develop skills and experience
- 🔍 To provide representation to a decision-making body, particularly if the organization is youth-focused
- 🔍 To recruit specific knowledge, skills or expertise held by young people in general or by individual youth
- 🔍 To acknowledge that participation is a fundamental right for all people, regardless of age.

Partnerships can grow out of an organization's mission or from the vision of one person — youth or adult. Adults who understand the value of these partnerships can help convince an organization to look at the potential rewards of bringing youth to the table. Why do adults want to share their power with young people? Because there are benefits for adults in partnerships too! Adults get to:

- 🔍 Experience the competence of youth first-hand and begin to perceive young people as legitimate, crucial contributors
- 🔍 Enhance their commitment and energy by working with youth
- 🔍 Gain confidence in their ability to work and relate to youth
- 🔍 Become more attuned to the needs and concerns of youth, understand programming issues and gain a stronger connection to the community
- 🔍 Receive fresh ideas from a different perspective
- 🔍 Reach a broader spectrum of people

- 🔍 Develop more appropriate and responsive services
- 🔍 Share knowledge
- 🔍 Increase creativity
- 🔍 Break down stereotypes about youth and adults

Youth-Adult partnerships come in many shapes and forms, and the roles played by youth and adults vary by the needs of the partnership. Adults may be role models, trainers, guides/advisors, cheerleaders, and workers/resources; and youth may be researchers, promoters, messengers/advocates, spirit raisers, and active participants. Young people have played many roles in partnership with adults, including:

- 🔍 Advisors/Consultants
- 🔍 Political Lobbyists/Activists
- 🔍 Grant Makers
- 🔍 Board Members
- 🔍 Service Providers

There are many ways to come together, and it's important to assess the needs of the organization to determine what type of partnership and talents are desired.

A good tool to assess organizational readiness is the checklist provided in the "Partnership Toolkit" section of this guide (pages 13-16). This checklist, based on Youth on Board's "14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making," can help organizations uncover hidden issues, help define tasks and guide their commitment to forming partnerships with young people. Evaluating all of this before young people are brought to the table will save much time and energy.



# Forming Youth-Adult Partnerships

In all of life's lessons, it is crucial that we are given the opportunity to take risks, learn and even fail. Youth are rarely given opportunities to make decisions before they turn eighteen, the age at which the vast majority of our society believes young people are capable of making their own choices. If adults expect young people to suddenly blossom into responsible and confident young adults, they must take the initiative to prepare them – that is, adults must step back in order for young people to step up!

There are three conditions that should be met before embarking on a youth adult partnership:

- Adults need to be willing to share their power and responsibility with young people
- Young people need to be willing to take on responsibility
- Both need skills to successfully work together

To reach this point, organizations should consider the following to determine how to involve young people:

- Do we want to obtain input from as many young people as possible?
- How much ownership do we want young people to have?
- Do we want a one-way or two-way information flow?
- Do we need in-depth or more superficial exploration of youth issues?
- Do we have the resources to designate specific people to support and guide young participants?
- How can we achieve the best outcomes for our organization and our youth participants?

To prepare for partnerships, organizations should strive to put the following into action:

1. Treat young people the same way they treat adults. This means putting all preconceived notions of young people to the side and allowing them the opportunity to shine. There are countless stories of young people rising up to lead successful campaigns for the environment, animal rights, and against drinking and driving.
2. Make a long-term commitment to involve youth. A young person's experience with your organization may have long-lasting effects. If the organization's intent is to involve young people because it's just a good idea, they will feel alienated and not taken seriously. Recruiting new youth becomes difficult when past partners have spoken poorly about their experience.
3. Involve youth from the beginning. If a new program is under consideration, youth should be invited to help design and critique it before it is launched. This also provides an opportunity for youth to define roles of ongoing participation related to the program.
4. Involve a diverse group of young people, not just the stars. Traditional youth leaders are obvious, but a less obvious young person may have a passion for your cause, a better perspective of the issue, and a huge willingness to participate.
5. Develop a clear vision that embraces youth-adult partnerships. Determine the level of current support of partnerships and work to increase it.
6. Involve parents and caregivers to make it easier for youth to participate. If other adults are invested, the commitment level of the young person increases.

7. Have a staff person dedicated to working with the partners – to recruit, train and support them.
8. Provide youth with meaningful ways to participate. They will not be content to complete meaningless projects. Assign youth to committees and assign tasks that make their participation meaningful. Otherwise, you lose their trust and patience. Youth are busy with other commitments; do not waste their time.
9. Recruit at least two young people to work in partnership with adults. Youth are naturally intimidated by adults -- having a peer nearby can help boost their confidence. Also, remember it is unreasonable to expect one youth to represent all other youth.
10. If possible, provide youth with a space of their own.
11. Check attitudes constantly. Most partnerships with youth fail because of bad adult attitudes rather than a lack of aptitude. If there is adult resistance, young people will know this and their determination will fade. Remain willing to work at and grow the relationship.

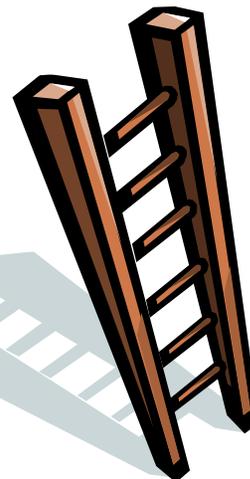
A good way to test your group's position on youth participation is the inventory of adult attitudes, developed by Bill Lofquist and located in the Toolkit section. Lofquist's "Spectrum of Attitudes" theory defines three levels of attitudes toward youth:

- Youth As Objects;
- Youth As Recipients; and
- Youth As Partners.

These levels can help determine the appropriate amount of youth involvement and identify the adults who are willing to work with and see young people as significant partners.

## Ladder of Youth Participation

Maximum Youth Involvement/  
Youth As Partners



- Actions are initiated and directed by youth
- Youth initiate, but share decisions with Adults
- Youth and Adults initiate and direct actions
- Adults initiate, but share decisions with Youth
- Youth are consulted and informed
- Youth are informed and assigned tasks
- Youth are tokens; may be asked for ideas
- Youth are used as decorations for the program
- Youth are used to communicate adults' messages

Minimum Youth Involvement/  
Youth As Objects

Once a clear idea of the type of partnership is formed, the organization should begin to select and recruit youth partners (if they don't seek out the organization first!). Young people should be recruited not simply for their age, but for the contributions they can make as individuals. Every person, at all ages, has opinions and expertise to offer to others. If this value is held from the outset, the young person's experience will be most meaningful.

The attributes sought should reflect the needs of the organization and fill the gaps in the existing leadership. It is helpful if the organization provides a profile of the type of person needed for their project or board. This will clearly identify the skills needed, the purpose of the position and the goals that the participants will plan to achieve.

# Barriers to Youth-Adult Partnerships

One of the most prominent barriers to successful youth-adult partnerships is the attitudes that both young people and adults hold about one another. Fortunately, the process of working together is a great way to overcome these attitudinal barriers.

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development offers an interesting list provided by young people and adults. When asked, "What is the greatest challenge a young person/adult brings in their ability to effectively work with adults/youth?," the responses included:

| Adult list about Youth                 | Youth list about Adults                     |
|--|---|
| Information overload                   | Selfish                                     |
| Black and white thinking               | Won't admit they are wrong                  |
| Patience for planning; time in general | Power; do it by themselves, no youth needed |
| Economics                              | Want opinions but shun ideas                |
| Lack of experience                     | Think that age creates power                |
| Peer pressure and priorities           | Expectations                                |
| Conflicting adult expectations         | Can't handle youth growing up               |
| Being heard and accepted               | Rules are rules                             |
| Dropping the ball                      | Don't remember how they were                |
| Follow through                         | Stress on winning too much                  |
| Youth as partners                      | Too involved with adults, not kids          |
| Strong desire for independence         | Won't apologize                             |

Many barriers are logistical and organizational in nature. These barriers prove that good intentions are not enough to create genuine partnerships. What is a barrier to a young person, is not necessarily a barrier to an adult, and vice versa.

Barriers that can be addressed and remedied include:

- 🔍 Schedule of Meetings — it may be necessary to schedule meetings in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate young peoples' class schedules and other commitments. Compromise is the key to working this out, as schedules are hectic for everyone.
- 🔍 Transportation — meetings should be held at accessible locations whenever possible and if transportation for youth cannot be arranged otherwise. Ideally, the organization will also provide reimbursement for these expenses for youth.
- 🔍 Food — carefully choose meals that are affordable for young people, or plan to pay for their meals. Youth should not be excluded from a group dinner because they cannot afford it.
- 🔍 Equipment and Support — young volunteers, staff, peer educators should have the same equipment as their adult counterparts. Failure to do this conveys to the youth that they are not as important as adults to your organization.
- 🔍 Procedures and Policies — appropriate policies should be in place to guide certain aspects of youth-adult partnerships, keeping in mind young peoples' need for independence. This includes such things as how overnight travel will be arranged, consent forms required for participation, and address the legal liability of the organization.
- 🔍 Training — as staff often require cultural competency training, they may also need to gain insight into ways to effectively work with young people as partners. Every staff person should make efforts to make each and every young person feel valued.

# Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships

It is a challenge to sustain effective, genuinely collaborative youth-adult partnerships. Successful partnerships have some important elements in common. Effective partnerships:

- Establish clear goals for the partnership. The youth and the adults must understand what their roles and responsibilities will be in achieving the goals.
- Share the power to make decisions. If youth have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of *partnership*.
- Get the highest levels of the organization to fully commit to youth's participation in the organization's work.
- Ensure that each adult and young person enters the partnership with a clear understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities. Not all adults will want to work with youth and not all youth will want to work with adults in a partnership capacity.
- Are selective. Young people vary widely in their development and in their readiness and willingness to assume responsibility. Being clear about the goals of the partnership and the roles that youth will play will help in identifying young people who are committed, reliable, and effective. At the same time, effective partnerships are selective about adult participants. The adults must believe that young people are assets and be willing and able to advocate on behalf of youth when stereotyping or negative assumptions about teens arise.
- Provide capacity building and training. Effective partnerships don't set young people up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Youth may need training in communication, leadership, assertiveness skills, interviewing, etc., as well as in specific areas of expertise. Similarly, effective partnerships don't set adults up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Adults may need training in communication, collaborative work, interviewing, or working with youth.
- Are aware that different styles of communication do not imply disrespect, disinterest, or different goals and expectations. Youth and adults say that the best way to resolve conflicts that arise out of different communication styles is to ask questions when one does not understand what is being said or why it is being said. Keeping the common goal in mind can also help resolve conflicts arising out of different communication styles.
- Value youth's participation and what they bring. Effective partnerships hold high expectations for participating youth and are not afraid of holding youth accountable for their responsibilities.
- Value adults' participation and what they bring. Adults frequently offer the partnership knowledge, experience, and access to resources. Effective partnerships guard against discounting potential adult allies, assuming that all adults hold negative stereotypes about youth, or believing that adults will have nothing of value to contribute to a program intended for youth.
- Include room for growth – next steps. Where can youth and adults go next? For example, peer education programs are often great vehicles for empowering young people and helping them develop important skills. However, these programs seldom include opportunities for advancement or for peer educators to assume more responsibility over time. Effective programs ensure that youth and the adults who work with youth have oppor-

tunities for advancement. Both youth and adults will have valuable experience and insights to bring to more senior positions in the organization.

- Remember that youth have other interests and priorities. Too often, adults will enthusiastically enlist the participation of a particularly effective and articulate young person in an overwhelming number of obligations and commitments. Check in often with partnership youth to ensure that they are taking on only as much as they can manage without neglecting other important aspects of their lives, such as family, friends, and education. Try to assist youth in recognizing when it is wise to say, "No," and support their decisions.

Youth-adult partnerships have much to offer youth, adults, and organizations that participate in them. Effective partner-

ships may be difficult to achieve. However, the benefits they offer are wide-ranging and significant. The first step is to acknowledge that youth have value and that their contributions have value. Commitment to youth's rights and a determination to recognize their rights and to hear their voices is the beginning of building effective youth-adult partnerships.

What do young people need to know about working with adults?

- Most adults have good intentions. Remember they are not used to working in partnership with young people.
- Criticism doesn't necessarily mean condescension or that an adult doesn't value your contribution. It may mean the adult is treating you the same way he/she would an adult colleague. Remember that adults are used to critiquing

WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN CREATE AND SUSTAIN YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS?

| <b>Share Decision Making</b>  | Give youth opportunities to decide                 | Active in decision making process   | Problem solve—work together                      | Find youth interests                    | Task-orientated/ goal setting         | Don't tell—offer options | Youth Advisory Boards | Youth-focused Advertising |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Promote Mutual Respect</b> | Non-judgmental; avoid stereotypes                  | All people are inherently worthy    | Equality between youth and adults                | Environments conducive to mutual growth | Accept person; accept/reject behavior |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Make it Fun</b>            | Recreation—quality activities together             | Community activities, sports, etc.  | Allowing youth to be themselves                  | Adult interaction with youth            |                                       |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Communicate Openly</b>     | Communication between adults and youth             | Communication—listen actively       | Clarify roles—adult as teacher, youth as student | Be flexible—avoid overreacting          | Be receptive—youth-adult              |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Empower Each Other</b>     | Reinforce self-esteem, establish mutual confidence | Release Power                       | Encouragement—be supportive                      | Adult support of youth                  | Opportunity—learn from one another    |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Validate Contributions</b> | Recognition—giving and getting                     | Establish incentives and rewards    |  |   |                                       |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Build Trust</b>            | Be consistent—in support, rules and enforcement    | Get commitment from youth & adult   | Trust—be accountable to your word                | Clarify rules—set boundaries            |                                       |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Provide Role Models</b>    | Mentors  | Role Model—practice what you preach | Guest speakers—innovative teaching               |   |                                       |                          |                       |                           |
| <b>Be Yourself</b>            | Model competency, model respect                    |                                     |  |   |                                       |                          |                       |                           |

each other's work and offering constructive ideas to improve a project. Just because an adult disagrees with someone, it doesn't mean they disrespects that person.

3. Adults may not be aware of the capabilities of young people. They can be told that young people are mature, but showing them is the best way to make the case.
4. Adults often feel responsible for the success or failure of the project. This makes it hard for them to share power. They may need reassurance that you are willing to share in both the successes and the failures.
5. Adults are just as uncertain as youth. They have just learned to disguise it better.
6. Sometimes adults use expressions, whether consciously or not, that annoy young people and are red flags that they aren't treating youth as partners. These phrases and expressions can erode a relationship. Be prepared to call adults on their language.
7. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Adults often use words, phrases, and acronyms that you might not understand. Adults new to the program may also not understand them. The language of nonprofits is riddled with terms that can bewilder any newcomer.
8. Don't be afraid to say "No." Adults will understand that you have other important commitments, like your education, family, friends, hobbies, and sports.

#### What do adults need to know about working with youth?

1. Be open to and nonjudgmental about young people's insights and suggestions. Let them know that their involvement is important.
2. Take advantage of the expertise that young people offer. They know about, and should be encouraged to share the needs of their community. Affirm this input.
3. Make sure youth will participate in meaningful ways. Young people should be involved in making decisions from the beginning of the project. Actively ask youths' opinions.
4. Be honest about expectations for the project, what you

want the youth to contribute, and how you hope to benefit from their participation. Don't expect more from youth than you do of adults. Keep expectations realistic; hold young people to your expectations. Do not patronize youth by lowering expectations.

5. Integrate young people into group and coalition efforts. Schedule meetings when they can attend and in accessible locations. Keep young people informed about plans and meeting times.
6. Treat youth as individuals. Don't assume one represents the views of all youth. Assure the young person that you are interested in their individual opinion and don't expect them to speak for an entire population.
7. Be prepared to offer support. Think about kinds of support (financial, logistical, training, emotional, etc.) it will take to involve youth, and who will provide this support.
8. Make the work interactive, fun, and valuable. Like adults, youth are more likely to get involved and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling.
9. Many youth feel intimidated by adults and are not used to participating in discussions with adults. Some may feel they have nothing to contribute. It requires time and commitment to get the input of these youth. Be aware of this factor and work to overcome it.
10. Don't make assumptions about what young people are like.
11. Don't move too fast. Remember that it takes time to develop trust and rapport with youth because some youth are unsure about adults' intentions. Take time to develop a good relationship with youth *before* expecting much. Remember that this work is often new to youth; take the time to explain why actions are taken. Youth may interpret adults' being abrupt and hurried as a sign of disinterest in youth's participation; go slow and explain what's going on.
12. Remember there are times when youth need to say, "No." They have competing interests and responsibilities in their lives. Their education, relationship and communities are important. Having fun is important. They need time and energy for these interests and responsibilities.

A key to sustaining healthy partnerships is ongoing assessment and evaluation of the relationships between young people and adults. In order to evaluate, certain aspects of the partnership need to be defined. These include:

1. Identifying and prioritizing the objectives of the project
2. Identifying specific goals and the factors that indicate the goals have been achieved
3. Preparing a timeline to indicate the steps needed to obtain the objective and when each step will occur
4. Preparing an organizational chart to define responsibilities within the context of the goals

Over time, a group will re-define itself and its objectives; therefore, it is important to revisit the objectives to see if they still fit your goals. Being able to show success will also potentially help procure funding from foundations that support youth-adult partnerships.

Look for these signs of success in your partnerships:

- 🔍 Enthusiasm — look for what gets people excited; what generates the most brainstorming. In contrast, attention should also be paid to what does *not* excite the group (indicated by sighs, heavy eyelids and sidebar conversations), or a formally engaged participant that becomes quiet.
- 🔍 Curiosity — if young people are asking questions, it is a very good sign. If participants have no questions, it could be an indication of boredom.
- 🔍 Clarity — when asked to define the project or program, do youth and adult participants have the same information? Make sure participants understand their roles and responsibilities. If partners are not following-through with their commitments or complain about the amount of work, it could be an indication that they've lost interest and are dissatisfied.
- 🔍 Growth in Membership — this indicates that young people

are communicating positively to their peers about their involvement. If membership does not grow or attendance drops, look for participant needs that are not being met.

- 🔍 Laughter — always an indicator of people having a good time, regardless of their age! If the partnership is fun, commitments will grow. On the flip side, rowdiness and challenging behaviors are indicative of a problem in need of attention.

All participants should feel like they have a way to voice their concerns and disappointments. This is possibly the most valuable way to learn and prepare for future partnerships. Failure can definitely help pave the way to success, so developing a method to collect opinions from the partners should be a priority. This can be as simple as a suggestion box — where input is anonymous, or it may be a one-on-one discussion with a staff member to address specific issues. The whole basis for youth-adult partnerships is to share knowledge. Efforts to ensure positive and negative feedback loops will produce positive results in the long run.



Once the group has defined its objectives, there should be an acknowledgement of this success. The Youth-Adult Partnership Declaration provided in the Toolkit section may be a way to formally recognize the commitment made by the partners. In addition, try to plan a celebration to recognize these creative, influential and community-aware young people and adults! Be sure to let the community know about the partnership and its successes along the way.

# Partnership Toolkit

## 50 THINGS ADULTS CAN DO WITH YOUTH!

Adapted from Search Institute's "50 Things Adults Can Do for Youth" by The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development. [www.theinnovationcenter.org](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org)

1. Have a real conversation with a young person. Ask a young person what they want to do and how you can help make that happen.
2. Support community organizations that involve young people in meaningful roles.
3. Start a branch resource library of videos and printed materials on youth involvement in your community.
4. Financially and personally support community organizations that train young people and adults to work together.
5. Develop a mutual mentorship program between adults and young people.
6. Co-create or support along with young people a community center or place for young people and adults to gather and do constructive things together.
7. Listen to young people express their concerns and perspectives about community issues and help them take action.
8. Be an advocate for youth by making sure they're at the table when you are discussing them.
9. Help with positive activities for youth such as sports teams, hobby clubs, music, drama, scouts, etc.
10. Make the concerns of young people visible in your community by helping young people get in the door.
11. Write a letter to the editor about youth issues with a young person.
12. Respect young people as you would a peer.
13. Work with young people to plan a community service project.
14. Take an active role in schools by listening to students who have first-hand knowledge and finding out how to best help them.
15. Invite young people over to dinner.
16. Involve interested young people as consultants, interns, apprentices, and staff.
17. Be consistent and clear about your expectations of youth and adults in your home.
18. Team up with youth and youth-led groups to have a town meeting on a vision for youth in your community.
19. Identify and network with youth in your community who are concerned about young people and/or other community issues.
20. Connect with other adult allies.
21. Provide transportation to young people who would not otherwise be able to participate in community activities.
22. Team up with young people to support candidates for local, state, and national office who make listening to and working with young people a priority!
23. Help arrange for a radio station to sponsor a call-in show led by youth that allows them to talk about their concerns.
24. Help arrange for concerned youth to have an audience with the mayor and the city council to highlight their concerns and recommendations.
25. Talk with others about the importance of having a community vision for community youth development.
26. Serve on an advisory council for a youth-led effort.
27. Only go to meetings where youth are invited or you can bring young people.
28. Be a friend to a young person.
29. Advocate for youth-led experiences in the schools so students can learn through hands-on experience.
30. Make your home a comfortable, safe, and affirming place where young people can "hang out."
31. Help young people create a newsletter for your community on youth and other community issues.
32. Help young people create a listing of all opportunities for youth involvement in your community. Post it in your local library and schools. Have realtors give it to new families in town.
33. Advocate, along with students, for strong, comprehensive sexuality and drug education curricula in your schools.
34. Take advantage of young people who are learned in the Internet. Learn together by surfing the Web.
35. Sponsor a support group for youth who face particular difficulties such as parents' divorce, violence, etc.
36. Raise funds for a youth-led organization.
37. Actively support youth-led organizations in your community.
38. Join (or form) with young people a community task force to address youth issues and coordinate responses.
39. Provide opportunities for young people to have meaningful roles at home, at school, at work, and in the community.
40. Cancel a meeting or engagement so you can spend time with a young person in your family or neighborhood.
41. Confide in a young person. Ask their advice on issues that you are struggling with.
42. Be an advocate for youth/adult partnerships in your workplace.
43. Start a parent support group to share ideas, concerns, and ways to listen better to children.
44. Value young people's work and pay them for their work. Don't assume that just because someone is young they are a volunteer. Hire youth.
45. Include youth on committees in your schools, faith-based environments, and community.
46. Attend events in the area where young people are actively engaged.
47. Write a short note of support to adult allies.
48. Treat youth as individuals; don't make one youth represent all young people.
49. Avoid interrupting young people.
50. DO involve youth from the beginning with program events all the way to the end with evaluation of events.

## THE DECLARATION: CREATING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH AND ADULTS

I accept the invitation to generate partnerships between youth and adults that involve young people in decision making. I believe young people should have a voice in our community. I am committed to creating partnerships because I believe that young people are resources for today, rather than in some distant future. I believe that partnerships between young people and adults provide benefits for both, as each learns from the other. I assert that our families, schools and communities will be happier and healthier when we are all working together.

I subscribe to these guiding principles for youth empowerment:

### Chances to Grow

I believe we must provide an array of opportunities for young people and adults to grow together as human beings by forming partnerships in the areas of decision making, leadership, advocacy and community service.

### Valuing Diversity

All individuals are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. I am committed to processes that reflect the equality of all people and that allow us to move beyond stereotypes to see what we have in common and what we can do together.

### Partnerships

I am committed to building partnerships among young people and adults, and I recognize that where adults are in power, they have a special responsibility to involve youth, and both need to be open to the experience of being equal partners.

To build partnerships, adults and young people have rights and responsibilities. I will work to assure that the youth and adults involved:

- Have access to the information, training, and experience needed to be full partners in decision making.
- Realize that each of us has a unique perspective and cannot speak for an entire group.
- Share ideas in ways that are true to our beliefs while communicating in ways that are understandable and respectful of others.
- Do what we say we will do as members of the partnership.

*My signature shows that I believe in these principles, rights, and responsibilities and signifies my commitment to support youth-adult partnerships.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Source: "Younger Voices Stronger Choices" by Loring Leifer and Michael McLarney

# ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Based on *Youth on Board's "14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making"*

## Using This Checklist:

This checklist is to be used as a guide to help give direction, uncover hidden issues, help understand tasks, and guide their commitment to this initiative. Use it as a tool with your board, staff, young people or other concerned parties.

\* Not every organization will be able to answer all the questions, this is merely a blueprint.

**Yes** = We do this already, and don't need assistance.

**No, next steps?** = 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.

|  |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| <b>1) Know Why You Want to Involve Young People</b>  |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Has your group thought about why you are involving young people in decision making?  |
|  |                 | Have you articulated these thoughts to others verbally, or in writing (such as in a mission statement)?  |
| <b>2) Assess Your Readiness</b>                      |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Have you talked to and assessed the commitment of:   |
|  |                 | 1) the board?  |
|  |                 | 2) staff members?  |
|  |                 | 3) young people?   |
|  |                 | 4) other parties for youth involvement?  |
| <b>3) Determine Your Model for Youth Involvement</b> |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Have you considered involving young people directly in an existing adult governing body, such as a board of directors or community task force? |
|  |                 | Have you considered creating an all-youth body such as a youth advisory board, youth planning committee, or peer mediation group?              |
|  |                 | Have you considered putting young people on your staff (e.g., as peer leaders or program staff)?   |

| <b>4) Identify Organizational Barriers</b> |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Have you created policies or amended bylaws stating that young people will be a permanent part of governing your organization, advising on curriculum, or developing programs?                               |
|  |                 | Has your organization taken the time to address the budget and staff considerations of involving young people?   |
|  |                 | Are young people's terms of office and voting rights similar or equal to those of adults?  |
|  |                 | Is there a replacement system if young people's terms end early (e.g. due to relocation or other life changes)?  |
|  |                 | Do young people have access to the resources needed to participate in your group's work, and are expenses paid for in advance as opposed to reimbursed?  |
|  |                 | Is there some leeway for young people's participation in school activities? (Work meetings are often acceptable reasons for adults to miss meetings. Is a big basketball game given the same consideration?) |
|  |                 | Have you developed a conflict of interest policy if young people are advising in a program they are involved in?   |

**5 A) Overcome Attitudinal Barriers – ADULTS**

| Yes | No, next steps? | N/A   |
|-----|-----------------|---|
|     |                 | Are young people involved in <i>all</i> issues, not just those affecting youth?   |
|     |                 | Does the group understand that youth members do not represent the voice of all young people?  |
|     |                 | Do you continually ask young people how you can assist them better, and do you take their recommendations seriously?                                    |
|     |                 | Have you considered your own negative assumptions and stereotypes about young people, in order to learn about sharing real authority with young people? |
|     |                 | Have you considered adjusting your professional "adult" language to ideas that young people can best understand?  |

**5 B) Overcome Attitudinal Barriers – YOUNG PEOPLE**

| Yes | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|-----|-----------------|--|
|     |                 | Have you recognized your own value in having your voice heard?                               |
|     |                 | Do you take leadership roles whenever possible (e.g. asking to be on committees)?            |
|     |                 | Do you share your thoughts even when you are not comfortable?                                |
|     |                 | Do you push for policies that promote young people's power (e.g. youth on committees, etc.)? |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>6) Address Legal Issues</b>                |  |
| Yes   | No, next steps? N/A  |
|   | Are board members aware of their obligations, including the duty of care – and duty of loyalty?  |
|   | Have you researched the specific laws concerning youth governance in your state, and contract laws relating to your governing body?  |
| <b>7) Recruit Young People</b>                |  |
| Yes   | No, next steps? N/A  |
|   | When recruiting members, do you recruit in ways that will attract a diverse group of young people?   |
|   | Do you use your recruitment process to educate your constituency about the project they are involved in, as well as the importance of involving young people in communities? |
|   | Have you thought out your recruitment criteria?  |
|   | If an all-adult group, do you select at least two young people to participate so they do not feel alone or isolated?   |
| <b>8) Create a Strong Orientation Process</b> |  |
| Yes   | No, next steps? N/A  |
|   | Is an adult of authority available to explain commitments to concerned parents?  |
|   | Is an orientation system in place?   |
|   | Do you have a letter of agreement or contract that describes the responsibilities of the program and the role you are asking the young person to take in the organization?   |
| <b>9) Train Young People for their Roles</b>  |  |
| Yes   | No, next steps? N/A  |
|   | Is there a system for youth members to train new youth members?  |
|   | Is there training for young people on presenting to groups (noting that all-adult groups can be specifically difficult)?   |
|   | Is there skill-training for young people on topics such as teambuilding, presentation skills, facilitating meetings, and reading budgets?                                    |
| <b>10) Conduct Intergenerational Training</b> |  |
| Yes   | No, next steps? N/A  |
|   | Is there training for adults on understanding young people and being strong allies?  |
|   | Are you innovative in your trainings? Are they experiential and fun?   |
|   | Is there room for everyone to listen to each other and laugh at meetings?  |

|  |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| <b>11) Make Meetings Work</b>              |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Do you start meetings with warm-up exercises or frequently split into small groups?  |
|  |                 | Is there time for all members to speak at meetings?  |
|  |                 | Do you use appreciations during meetings?  |
| <b>12) Develop a Mentoring Plan</b>        |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Is a mentor or “buddy” system in place?  |
|  |                 | Is there staff to support youth members (e.g. preparation, transportation for meetings, etc.)?   |
|  |                 | Is there regular contact between youth members and adult leaders (e.g. Executive Directors, Board Chairs, principals, CEOs, etc.)?                   |
|  |                 | Do mentors make certain that new members attend meetings, have the support they need, and become well-oriented to the organization they have joined? |
| <b>13) Build Youth/Adult Relationships</b> |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Does everyone understand that strong relationships are key to successful programs and social change movements?                                       |
|  |                 | Is there informal time for young people and adults to build close relationships with each other?   |
|  |                 | Do you keep your commitment to young people consistent, not letting them be overshadowed by “more important” meetings and commitments?               |
|  |                 | Do you make sure young people are given the opportunity to speak on every issue, not just program issues?  |
|  |                 | If young people seem not to have an opinion, do you respond and give them the information they need?   |
|  |                 | Is equal weight given to their opinions?   |
|  |                 | Does the organization involve parents from the start?  |
|  |                 | Does the organization let the young person know it will be speaking with their parents but not breaking confidentiality?                             |
| <b>14) Create Support Networks</b>         |                 |  |
| Yes  | No, next steps? | N/A  |
|  |                 | Do young people keep in touch with their peers about their leadership roles and their program?   |
|  |                 | Is there specific time for young people to network with other youth leaders doing similar work?  |
|  |                 | Is there time set aside for adults to network with other adults doing similar work?  |

# Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior Toward Young People

Instructions: Select the level that best describes your own belief or approach regarding each and statement and place the number in the blank.

|       |   |        |   |           |   |       |   |        |
|-------|---|--------|---|-----------|---|-------|---|--------|
| 1     | 2 | 3      | 4 | 5         | 6 | 7     | 8 | 9      |
| Never |   | Seldom |   | Sometimes |   | Often |   | Always |

- \_\_\_ 1. As an adult leader, I engage young people in program decisions when I think this engagement will be a growth experience for them.
- \_\_\_ 2. It is most appropriate for adults to determine what the programs for youth will be.
- \_\_\_ 3. Young people have a vantage point that is valuable for evaluating the successes and failures of specific programs.
- \_\_\_ 4. In our organizational decision making, adults should make the decisions.
- \_\_\_ 5. I believe that allowing young people to participate in organizational roles can open valuable learning opportunities for them.
- \_\_\_ 6. As an adult leader, I engage young people in making program decisions at the earliest point.
- \_\_\_ 7. Asking young people to review adult-determined program plans will communicate to the young people that the adults respect them.
- \_\_\_ 8. Adults are in the best position to evaluate the successes and failures of specific programs.
- \_\_\_ 9. Youth participation can enhance and enrich the various management roles within our organization.
- \_\_\_ 10. Fewer mistakes are made in carrying out a program for youth if adults perform the leadership roles themselves.
- \_\_\_ 11. I believe that experiences of young people give them a valuable perspective that can become useful in efforts to plan, operate and evaluate the way the organization functions.
- \_\_\_ 12. Asking the opinions of young people will help them sharpen their thinking and observational skills.
- \_\_\_ 13. Allowing young people to assume some leadership roles can help them develop skills for the future.
- \_\_\_ 14. In our organizational decision making, adults and young people should make the decisions together.
- \_\_\_ 15. I believe that allowing young people to participate in organizational decision making would mislead them into thinking they can influence matters beyond their control.

**Inventory Scoring Instructions:**

Transfer the numbers given to each statement in the style that contains the box for that statement. For example, if you put a four by the first statement, then put a four in the box under the Style 2 column. In statement two, the number would go in Style 1.

Total the numbers at the bottom of each column. The one with the highest score is the one that best characterizes your attitude toward youth.

| Statement     | Style 1                  | Style 2                  | Style 3                  |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1             |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| 2             | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
| 3             |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4             | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
| 5             |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| 6             |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7             |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| 8             | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
| 9             |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10            | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
| 11            |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12            |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| 13            |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |
| 14            |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15            | <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                          |
| <b>Total:</b> |                          |                          |                          |

Here is how Bill Lofquist defines the three styles:

**STYLE 1 - YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS OBJECTS:** Within this part of the attitudinal spectrum the most extreme posture sees young people as the “property” of the adult and serves as a justification for abusive treatment of various kinds. As a result,

the adult controls the young person to serve whatever interests the adult may have. This may include such behavior as child abuse and the use of young people for pornographic purposes, both of which are criminal behavior.

Less extreme, but within this same part of the spectrum, is the attitude that adults know what is best for young people and see young people as the objects of their good intentions. This is not an uncommon attitude, and it is often seen in adults who work professionally and as volunteers with young people. Within this attitude there is little room for a consideration of what young people think about the design of the program or opportunity. As the adult sees it, the responsibility of the young person is to take advantage of the program or opportunity designed by the adult.

**STYLE 2 - YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS RECIPIENTS:** The emphasis within this part of the spectrum is on young people as the recipients of the benefits of the program or opportunity. This may include youth participation in the design of the opportunity, but the primary emphasis of this attitude of the controlling adult(s) is on how the young person will benefit from participation and not on what the young person has to offer to the design process. The adult is still well in control of the conditions under which the young person participates, but *allows* youth participation because of the *value of the experience* to the young person. This attitude is also based upon the notion that adults know what is best for young people, and may lead one cautiously to begin to open the door to youth participation on the adult’s terms. This relationship cannot reasonably be described as an adult/youth partnership, though there is some opportunity for the building of a sense of youth ownership in the outcome of the decisions made. This attitude demonstrates a concern for preparing young people for the *future* as responsible decision makers.

**STYLE 3 - YOUNG PEOPLE VIEWED AS RESOURCES:** This attitude is based upon respect for the contribution young people can make to the planning, operation and evaluation of a youth-focused organization (or family or community) in the *present*. It acknowledges that any leadership and decision making roles involved can be shared by adults and young people. This may mean that both young people and adults need to learn the skills and attitudes necessary for shared decision making, and it may require some change in policy and administrative practice within the organization, or perhaps a reformulation of the organization’s mission, if there is to be a shift toward this attitude from one of those described above.

# Resources

- The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development provides a variety of training and resources. Contact 301.961.2837 or <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>, or [info@theinnovationcenter.org](mailto:info@theinnovationcenter.org)
- Center for 4-H Youth Development part of the University of Minnesota's Extension Office: <http://www.fourh.umn.edu/>
- Youth on Board provides training and resources to help revolutionize the role of young people in society. Visit <http://www.youthonboard.org> or call 617.623.9900.
- *Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming*, a title in Advocates for Youth's series, Issues at a Glance, is available free in English, French, and Spanish at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org> or call 202.347.5700.
- The Activism 2000 Project, is a non-partisan organization, encouraging young people to speak up and pursue lasting solutions to problems they care deeply about. Visit <http://www.youthactivism.com> or call 1.800.KID.POWER.
- The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, a program of the Academy for Educational Development, is dedicated to contributing to better futures for all youth. Learn more at <http://cyd.aed.org/>
- Community Partnerships with Youth is a national training and resource development organization dedicated to promoting active citizenship through youth and adult partnerships. <http://www.cpyinc.org/>
- Community Connections for Competent Youth is a program of the University of Wyoming's Cooperative Extension Service. Learn more at <http://www.uwyo.edu/ces/FAMILY/CYFAR/Cyfar.htm>
- The Forum for Youth Investment helps organizations that invest in youth invest in change. Headed by oft-quoted youth development researcher, Karen Pittman, the Forum offers insightful articles and research papers. <http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org> or 301.270.6250
- LISTEN, Inc. is committed to developing leadership and to strengthening the social capital of urban youth ages 14-29 for civic engagement and community problem solving. Visit them online at <http://www.lisn.org> or call 202.483.4494
- The National Youth Agency of the United Kingdom offers a great deal of information on successful programs in the UK. Go to <http://www.nya.org.uk>.
- National Youth Development Information Center has a plethora of resources available on its website: <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/>. 1.877.NYDIC.4.U
- Public Private Ventures offers information on ways communities can work with youth and information about youth development in general. <http://www.ppv.org> or call 215.557.4400
- Project AIM is a youth-driven assets approach that provides pre-existing youth organizations with a foundation for success. Learn more at <http://www.project-aim.org> or call 1.877.353.1333
- What Kids Can Do is a site dedicated to telling the stories of young people who are working with adults and their communities on issues of most concern to them. Visit <http://www.whatkidscando.org> or call 401.247.7665
- Youth Action Net connects youth activists to one another and tells their stories. <Http://www.youthactionnet.org>
- Youth Today-Youth Tomorrow has links to many topics related to youth leadership and youth development. Find them at <http://www.ytyt.org>
- The Maze website of Australia's Office of Employment and Youth has great resources for youth and adults working together. See it all at <http://www.maze.sa.gov.au/>
- National Youth Rights Association provides an online forum for rights activists. See more at <http://nyra.ecg.net>
- Partnership for Children is Kansas City's effort to engage youth in working for change. <http://www.pfc.org>
- Youth Ventures is a mass movement of young people who are changing the world by creating ventures that enrich their communities. <http://www.youthventure.org> or 703.527.4126

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