

Being Y-AP Savvy

A Primer on Creating & Sustaining
Youth-Adult Partnerships



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About the ACT for Youth Center of Excellence

The ACT for Youth Center of Excellence connects positive youth development resources and research to practice in New York State and beyond. The Center provides:

- Technical support, training, and evaluation for youth-serving programs funded by the New York State Department of Health
- Youth development and adolescent sexual health resources
- A home base for the ACT Youth Network, which connects young community activists across New York State

The Center is a partnership among Cornell University Family Life Development Center, Cornell University Cooperative Extension of New York City, New York State Center for School Safety, and University of Rochester Medical Center.


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ACT for Youth: www.actforyouth.net
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Introduction



GETTING READY:
Purpose and Structure
of Manual



Defining Y-AP

Y-AP is not simply youth and adults being in the same room. They are working together as colleagues, struggling together, and celebrating their successes. Our definition is this:

Youth-adult partnership is involving youth and adults in responsible, challenging, and collective action that seeks to benefit an organization or larger community. All individuals in the partnership have the opportunity to engage in planning, decision-making, and action consistent with their own interests and skill.

It is not expected that all youth and all adults will be involved in all decision-making. Some members do not have sufficient time to always participate; other members may not always be adequately prepared to participate.

Y-AP can be a powerful tool for organizational improvement. Organizational improvement is not about youth leading the charge and having the right type of energy. Nor is it about adults having the proper wisdom and years of experience. Rather organizational improvement is about all staff and participants - regardless of age – having the legitimate opportunity to work collectively, bringing their unique talents and perspectives to the table. *The term “partnership” reminds us that the engagement and voice of both youth and adults are critical.*

A Note on Terminology

There are many terms used to describe the inclusion of youth in collective decision making. These terms include: youth participation, youth voice, youth in governance, youth organizing, youth civic engagement, and the like.

This manual uses the term “youth engagement” as an umbrella term to describe the various ways that youth participate in organizational decisions and action. Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) is considered to be the most central aspect of authentic youth engagement.

Who is this Manual for?

This manual is not written for “novices” or for “experts.”

This manual is for all persons who wish to enhance their learning about Y-AP, those who wish to share their experience and skill with others, and most importantly, those who want to learn collectively with others.

This manual works best with groups of two or more persons who are willing and able to devote some focused attention over a sustained period of time to improving their practice and that of their organization.

This manual is appropriate for youth, volunteers, front line staff, community residents, organizational partners, managers, administrators, and board members. You don't need to include everybody at all times in the learning process. Whatever mix of people works for you and your organization is perfect in order to get started.

The most important thing is to start.

Purpose of Manual

What are the “leverage points” that facilitate positive change? There are many, of course. This manual is designed to help strengthen three key leverage points that are fundamental to quality Y-AP within organizations and communities. Specifically, the purpose of this manual is to help stakeholders:

- Acquire core knowledge about Y-AP
- Establish one's own point of view about Y-AP, and the ability to communicate it to others
- Build consensus on key issues regarding Y-AP

Knowledge

Knowledge is power. Change depends on people having a diverse range of knowledge gleaned from research, experience, observation, and tradition. This manual presents short summaries of current research and current thinking about Y-AP. We also provide links to additional research and practical theory.

The research summaries may sound “academic” on first reading. This is the nature of research. But, remember, research is just a tool and does not, in and of itself, bring about change. *Change is facilitated when stakeholders actively discuss how research and theory relate (or do not relate) to their own experience, to their own practice.* Change is facilitated when people try to interpret and make sense of research findings. This manual is designed to provide ample opportunities and guidance in applying research to practice.

Power and Planning

Establishing One's Point of View

It is easy to get overwhelmed from too much information. Positive change can occur when each person establishes his or her own point of view on critical issues. For this reason, the manual includes a variety of “tools” – key questions, practical activities, assessments – to guide individuals in the process of establishing their own point of view. *An informed point of view demands personal reflection and critical thinking over time. Moreover, an informed point of view has to be communicated well in order to influence change.* The tools in this manual are designed to promote such reflection and critical thinking. The tools are designed to help people clearly state their ideas and positions.

The tools are written to be quite “basic.” But don’t be fooled. While the questions are simple, you will find it challenging and satisfying to arrive at practical answers.

Discussion and Consensus Building

Organizational change is a collective endeavor. *Organizational change ultimately arises from discussion about things that matter. It comes from people willing to come together to build consensus and take collective action.* Knowledge, points of view, tools, and data are simply the means to an end. For this reason, the manual is designed to guide groups in building organizational consensus about the practice of Y-AP.

The important thing is this: Ask questions and listen to how people respond, make declarative statements that tell people what you really are thinking, and finally, work to find consensus.

Organizational improvement requires a group of individuals who are committed to enhancing their own collective learning, and who are committed to using this knowledge to identify and adopt “best” practices. This manual, therefore, is geared toward organizational change through small group learning and action.

Different persons/groups have different institutional power to make organizational decisions. Organizational change ultimately requires the “buy in” of these persons/groups. It may be useful to involve some key persons with institutional power (e.g., program directors, executive directors, board members, community leaders) from the very beginning. Alternatively, you might wait to involve them directly until your group has engaged in shared learning and has roughed out recommendations for improvement. At that point, you could have a formal organizational-wide meeting to present your insights and ideas for organizational improvement through Y-AP.

The most important thing is that you have a clear rationale and a plan for who you are involving, and when, and how you expect to gain the active endorsement of those people/groups with institutional power. This manual will help you work through these issues

Structure of Manual

This manual has six chapters. Each chapter focuses on one “essential question.” The essential questions are simple AND they are very difficult to answer.

If your organization is able to come to agree on answers to these simple questions, it will be well positioned to design and implement quality Y-AP.

To help you answer the essential questions, each chapter has two sections. The “Necessary Knowledge” section presents current research on Y-AP. The “Tools” section provides activities that you help you translate the knowledge into practice.

Each chapter builds on each other to help you create a vision and a plan of action for Y-AP in your organization.

CHAPTER #1

What are the core ingredients for quality Y-AP in organizations?

This chapter explores five core ingredients for quality Y-AP: youth choice and options, clear roles and expectations, time and preparation, encourage collective mentoring, and the (no) magic bullet.

The chapter then offers Tools to help you determine what quality Y-AP could look like in your organization.

CHAPTER #2

Why is Y-AP important for your organization?

This chapter explores the benefits of Y-AP to youth, adults and institutions.

The chapter then offers Tools to help determine the outcomes that your organization would like to achieve by increasing youth engagement.

CHAPTER #3

Where should Y-AP occur within our organization?

This chapter explores six ways in which youth can be engaged: governance and policymaking, training and outreach, organizing and activism, communication and media, service and philanthropy, and research and evaluation.

The chapter then offers Tools to help you determine the current level of youth engagement in your organization and to begin identify places where you might want to establish Y-AP.

CHAPTER #4

How do we build a culture of partnership in our organization?

This chapter explores how organizations can sustain a culture of partnership through the adoption of partnership values, the creation of partnership structures, and the enactment of collective action.

The chapter then offers Tools to allow you to assess your current partnership culture and to determine action steps for strengthening it.

CHAPTER #5

How do we manage organizational change toward Y-AP?

This chapter explores leadership goals and key strategies that maximize the adoption of innovative practice: maintaining attention on the purposes and outcomes of Y-AP, translating a vision of Y-AP into usable practices, and building a sense of shared ownership for Y-AP.

The chapter then offers Tools to help organizational leaders identify and utilize the leverage points within their organizations.

CHAPTER #6

How can quality Y-AP be sustained in our organization?

This chapter explores the importance of organizational self-assessment and collective celebration to sustaining quality Y-AP.

The chapter concludes with an overview of Youth-Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE), a comprehensive resource for using Y-AP as a strategy for evaluating one’s own organization and using the data for continuous improvement. YALPE provides a full range of assessment instruments, analysis tools, and user guides.

Tool #1

Assessing Motivations



The adoption of quality Y-AP depends on the motivation of many people to take on the task. Without commitment, quality Y-AP cannot be implemented well. Before you further explore Being Y-AP Savvy, we encourage you to take a few moments to assess the motivations behind improving youth engagement in your organization.

On a scale of 1-3, how interested are you in improving Y-AP in your organization (1- somewhat, 2- moderate, 3- considerable)?

Explain your rating:

On a scale of 1-3, how interested are adult staff in improving Y-AP in your organization (1- somewhat, 2- moderate, 3- considerable)?


Explain your rating:

Chapter One



Essential Question:

What are the Core
Ingredients for Quality
Y-AP in Organizations?



Necessary Knowledge

There are many organizations that have experimented with, and developed best practices for, implementing quality Y-AP. There is also useful research that you can draw on. This chapter draws on the current knowledge base to identify five “core ingredients” needed for quality Y-AP.

core ingredient # one

Youth Need Choice, Youth Need Options

Not all young people have the same interests or the same skill sets. Some youth love the idea of being an organizer of people and are experienced in doing so. Other youth are skilled at communications or research. Still others see themselves as future community leaders, politicians or lawyers. They want to get involved in organizational governance.

If your organization provides options for youth participation, the organization will be in a much better position to recruit youth to become involved, and stay involved. Youth will be in a better position of finding a match for their interests, experience, and skill.

core ingredient # two

Establish Clear Roles and Expectations

When youth and adults are working together in a new situation, they may be nervous or unsure about their role. Structure and role clarity are necessary to help them ease through this transition. Establishing clear roles helps a group function more effectively because each member knows what he/she is expected to accomplish. Clarity also provides group members with the structure and boundaries that allow them to manage their limited time.

CORE Ingredients for Quality Y-AP

- **Youth Need Choice, Youth Need Options**
- **Establish Clear Roles and Expectations**
- **Time and Preparation**
- **Encourage Collective Mentoring**
- **Carefully Select Where Y-AP Is Most Needed**

core
ingredient
three

Time and Preparation are Required for Quality Y-AP

It is hard to effectively collaborate with others. Youth can have trouble working with other youth, and adults can also have trouble working with their age peers. It makes sense that youth and adults will face challenges in working with each other.

There are solutions. The first solution is “time.” The youth and adults who are partnering together need to find the time to get to know each other, to brainstorm, and to explore ideas. When organizations build in sufficient time for youth and adults to not only work together, but also to get acquainted, success follows.

The second solution is preparation. Youth and adults need a shared orientation before they get to work. They need to prepare and look ahead to future tasks. They need a chance to learn about how other youth-adult partnerships have been successful, and how they have overcome challenges. Organizations may bring in people from the community – youth and adults – who have experience with Y-AP and ask them to conduct an orientation. Often, organizations have the expertise in-house to conduct the orientation.

core
ingredient
four

Encourage Collective Mentoring

We typically think of a “mentor” as an experienced individual serving as a guide for a novice learner. Collective mentoring, in contrast, emphasizes shared teaching and learning between more than two people.

Collective mentoring encourages each group member to be responsible for teaching others. For example, organizations can arrange an informal lunch meeting for people to talk about what they are learning in partnerships. Or during staff meetings everyone can share a best practice.

By encouraging collective mentoring, organizations can ensure that youth and adults effectively form partnerships.

core
ingredient
five

Carefully Select Where Y-AP Is Most Needed

We do not wish to suggest (at all) that Y-AP will automatically transform your organization and improve its effectiveness tenfold. Y-AP takes work. Organizations have to commit to the approach, choose a few places in which to implement it, and discover for themselves how to make it work.

Take Away Message

If your organization orients its planning towards these core ingredients, the likelihood of success will be greatly enhanced



Chapter 1

Tools



There are three tools in this section:

- The first tool, *Defining Quality Youth-Adult Partnerships*, asks you to articulate what “quality” Y-AP means to you and others in your organization.
- The second tool, *Assessing Individual and Group Expectations*, helps you identify the level of commitment to Y-AP within your organization.
- The third tool, *Applying the Core Ingredients*, provides a real-world case study for you to analyze.

Remember, each activity is intended to promote discussion among stakeholders within your organization.

Tool #2

Defining Quality Youth-Adult Partnerships



Respond to the following discussion questions. Remember: the simple questions are the hardest and most important to answer. Be sure to discuss these questions with others in your organization.

What does “quality” youth-adult partnership mean to you?

What do you believe are the core ingredients for quality Y-AP in organizations?

How would others in your organization agree or disagree with you?

Tool #3

Assessing Individual and Group Expectations



First, circle whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Your answers should be based on your initial gut response. Don't over-think.

Next, discuss your responses in a whole group setting. A group member should read a statement aloud and ask others to share their responses. Members should be given an opportunity to explain the reason for their response.

The idea of engaging young people in decision-making excites me.	Agree	Disagree
Young people have a right to be heard on matters impacting their lives.	Agree	Disagree
The idea of engaging young people in decision-making makes me nervous.	Agree	Disagree
Our program/organization regularly solicits the input of young people.	Agree	Disagree
I believe engaging young people in organizational decision making will positively impact our organization.	Agree	Disagree
I think engaging young people in organizational decision making will positively impact the adults in our organization.	Agree	Disagree
I believe engaging youth in organizational decision making will positively impact the young persons development.	Agree	Disagree
Our program/organization is prepared to include young people in decision making processes.	Agree	Disagree

There are different strategies to make data gathering more interactive. Here are a few that we have used which spark group reflection and discussion.

Variation 1: Give each member in your group an index card. One side of the card should read *agree*, the other *disagree*. Read the first statement in this assessment and ask group members to hold up the index card stating if they agree or disagree. Have group members look around and discuss the reason for the various responses. Repeat this process for each statement.

Variation 2: Read the statement. Ask people to stand up if they agree; have them sit down. Ask them to stand up if they disagree. Have group members discuss their reasons for the various responses. Repeat this process for each statement.

Variation 3: Blow the page up into a series of separate posters that can be hung on the walls. Give members of the group sticky dots for pasting their responses to the questions directly on the poster. Process the findings together with the group discussing their reasons for the various responses.

Tool #4

Applying the Core Ingredients



Read the following case study and consider which core ingredients are present and which are missing. Discuss your answers with a group and determine what steps you would take to increase youth engagement.

Case:

During a Parks and Recreation committee meeting, a county board supervisor suggested including youth representatives on the county board. At first, other supervisors were hesitant. Many felt unprepared to interact with young people, some questioned youth's ability to understand the county issues, and still others felt youth would not be interested or committed to such an opportunity.

Over the next couple months, county staff gave presentations to board supervisors and addressed the adults' concerns. Staff explained that other counties and organizations were increasingly placing youth in decision-making roles and highlighted the positive benefits of youth engagement.

Many logistical questions were then raised: How many youth would participate? Who would be responsible for supporting the youth? What voting rights would they have?

The county staff members consulted with the Parks and Recreation committee and asked them to make decisions about these key issues. The committee felt it was important to include as many youth as possible. Therefore, they decided it was best for young people to serve on committees, instead of directly on the board. This would allow more youth to participate and also ensure young people had the option to serve on a committee that aligned with their personal interests. The committee also decided to assign two youth representatives to each committee, in order to make the young people feel more comfortable. In addition, one adult supervisor per committee was assigned the role of "mentor" and asked to serve as an advocate for the young people. Lastly, the committee decided the youth would cast an advisory vote prior to the full committee vote. This allowed the youth's perspective to be heard, although their vote was non-binding.

After these key issues were addressed, a referendum allowing youth representatives to serve on the county board was passed unanimously. Although many county board supervisors were

skeptical of including youth, the vote was publicly reported and supervisors were concerned how community members might perceive their “negative” vote.

That year, eighteen youth representatives were selected to participate on county board committees. Youth representatives were mailed a packet that provided a brief overview of their responsibilities. The packet also included a list of committee meeting dates and the names of the mentors. The youth were instructed to show up to the first committee meeting. No additional information or resources were provided.

After the young people completed their first year, county staff members met with them to discuss their experiences. The staff members learned that many youth were disappointed with their experiences. Many young people claimed their assigned mentors never spoke to them. Both youth and adults were unable to clearly define the role and responsibilities of the assigned mentor. In addition, many youth felt they were unable to actively contribute to committee meetings. They did not believe the adults would take their ideas seriously and they were scared to participate.

The staff members already selected youth representatives for the next term and want to ensure the next group of young people has a positive experience.

Task:

Imagine you are a county staff member. Which core ingredients are present and which are missing? What steps would you take to ensure future youth representatives have a positive experience?

Follow-Up Activity:


As a group, share your own “case studies.” Discuss other organizations that have adopted youth engagement. What lessons can you learn from these additional cases?

Chapter Two



Essential Question:

Why is Y-AP important
for our organization?



Necessary Knowledge

What benefits can communities and organizations expect to gain by making Y-AP a local priority?

It is becoming accepted that youth-adult partnership is a fundamental element of effective prevention programming. There is a solid body of evidence demonstrating that Y-AP has developmental benefits for youth and can help prepare them to take on leadership roles within the community. There is an increasing awareness that Y-AP may also promote community-level outcomes, in terms of positively influencing adult staff, local leaders, and community policy.

The following section outlines the types of benefits that organizations and communications can expect when they design and implement strong youth-adult partnerships.

Youth-Adult Partnerships promote positive youth development

When young people are actively engaged in meaningful volunteer service, and work in close collaboration with adults, they are likely to show better school performance, more positive self-concept, better relationships with peers, increased social contacts, a greater sense of responsibility, and higher rates of college graduation. They are also more likely to have lower levels of alcohol and drug use, later onset of sexual activity, lower levels of delinquency, and reduced levels of depression.

Impacts on Youth Development

Safety and Belonging: Youth feel accepted, supported and respected within the organization. They experience a strong sense of collective identity and pride in membership.

Efficacy and Empowerment: Youth increase confidence in their ability to effect change within their settings. They come to “own” their expertise and accomplishments as leaders.

Sociopolitical Awareness and Civic Competence: Youth learn how to critically analyze the relationship between their own lived experience and larger social, economic and political structures. Youth also gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to participate as civic actors.

Community Connections: Youth gain a deep understanding of their community and a closer connection to their peers. Adults connect youth with professional networks and opportunities.

Youth-Adult Partnerships have positive impacts on adult staff and community leaders

Research also indicates that Y-AP can enhance the ability and commitment of adult community leaders to address local issues, especially those regarding young people. Specifically, Y-AP challenges the negative stereotypes that leaders often have about young people. It challenges leaders to increase their own awareness about youth concerns and youth issues. With this awareness, community leaders become more motivated to include youth and to expand opportunities for youth voice. They become more confident in their own practice. After working with youth, for example, board members of organizations report an enhanced sense of organizational belonging and self-efficacy. The board members become better able to understand the concerns and perspectives of youth. Similarly, local government officials come to see participating youth as being “prepared,” “thoughtful,” and “respectful.” They start to reflect and become open to the idea that many youth are motivated and prepared to contribute to their communities.

Impacts on Adult Staff and Community Leaders

Confidence and Competence: Adults develop skills and attitudes they need to effectively share power and responsibility with youth on an on-going basis.

Generativity: Adults experience satisfaction in passing along their experience to a new generation.

Reflect on Negative Stereotypes: Adults recognize and address their assumptions about young people. They develop a new respect for youth competence and expertise.

Advocate for Youth Participation: Adults commit to making youth-adult partnership part of their own practice and use the power of their position to promote youth engagement in new settings.

“My experiences have really changed me on a personal level. I am now a person that I can depend on. I think that anybody could call on me in this organization and I can do what they need me to do. I am usually a pretty busy, flighty person and now I’m trying to really be devoted to certain things. I think that I really feel my devotion as I am leaving high school – graduating high school – just to be involved as a youth mobilizer. I’m really proud of myself to have that devotion and be dependable.”
—Youth Involved in Community Organizing

“This program changes you, changes who you are. It’s just really defined who I am and what I want to be doing. It’s really instilled the idea of social movements in me. I love that ideas and that’s what I really want to pursue in the future. Wherever I am with this, I want to be mobilizing people to do what they feel is important.”
—Youth Involved in Community Organizing

VOICES
from the Field

Youth-Adult Partnerships benefit organizations and communities

Ultimately, when youth and adults work together, organizations and communities get stronger. Their capacity expands and they are better able to provide necessary opportunities and supports to youth. The types of issues addressed by decision-making bodies (e.g., board of directors, school boards, local government) can begin to reflect the critical interests, concerns, and priorities of young people.

Impacts on Organizations and Communities

Institutionalized Expectations of Youth Participation: Norms and traditions change as youth become a standard part of community decision making.

Civic Agendas Reflect Youth Voice: The types of issues addressed by decision-making bodies reflect the critical interests, concerns and priorities of young people.

New Community Coalitions Emerge: Youth organizers reach out beyond the youth development field to engage a wide range of community partners in order to address these complex issues.

Responsive Public Institutions: Public institutions respond with resources, policies and programs that better serve youth and communities.

“I was resistant to youth on the board at first. But now I know them. My listening skills and understanding have increased dramatically...I get to see young people all the time now. I personally see and hear the passion of young people and it gets me more interested and engaged.”

—Adult Board Member of a Youth-Serving Organization

“The stories that youth tell us in the meetings change the decision making in ways that are totally unexpected. They tell us things like, “we are the statistics,” and “we are living the life so listen to what we are saying.” Now we have new ideas and new voice in the mix. Adults hear these stories. They organization tried to respond.”

—Adult Board Member of a Youth-Serving Organization

VOICES
from the Field

Youth-Adult Partnerships hold promise for preparing and motivating a new generation of community and nonprofit leaders.

Civic participation – be it in conventional activities such as high school governance and sustained community service or in socio-political activities such as community organizing – starts youth on a developmental path toward constructive citizenship and civic action. Youth who are more involved during middle and high school are more likely to engage in early and middle adulthood. Indeed, the strongest predictor of adult voting, participation in social movements, and involvement in voluntary associations is participating in political activities as a youth. Moreover, Y-AP helps young people forge powerful identities as civic actors, while concurrently helping them gain the skills to become effective participants.

Take Away Message

Many adults think it's only youth who benefit from participating, but actually adults benefit as much (if not more) than young people.



Chapter 2

Tools



It's time for a brief application tool. The one tool in this section, *Anticipating Your Impacts*, asks you to identify the impacts your organization is most interested in achieving by engaging youth.

Tool #5

Anticipating Your Impacts



This tool contains two steps. Group members respond individually to the question in Step One. Then, in Step Two, group members share their responses and discuss the provided questions.

Step One: Individual Response

In the previous tools section, you identified one area where your organization wants to strengthen youth engagement. What are the impacts you hope to achieve by strengthening youth engagement in this area? (Feel free to include impacts not listed in the Necessary Knowledge section).

Impacts on Youth

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

Impacts on Adult Staff

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

Organizational Impacts


- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

Chapter Three



Essential Question:

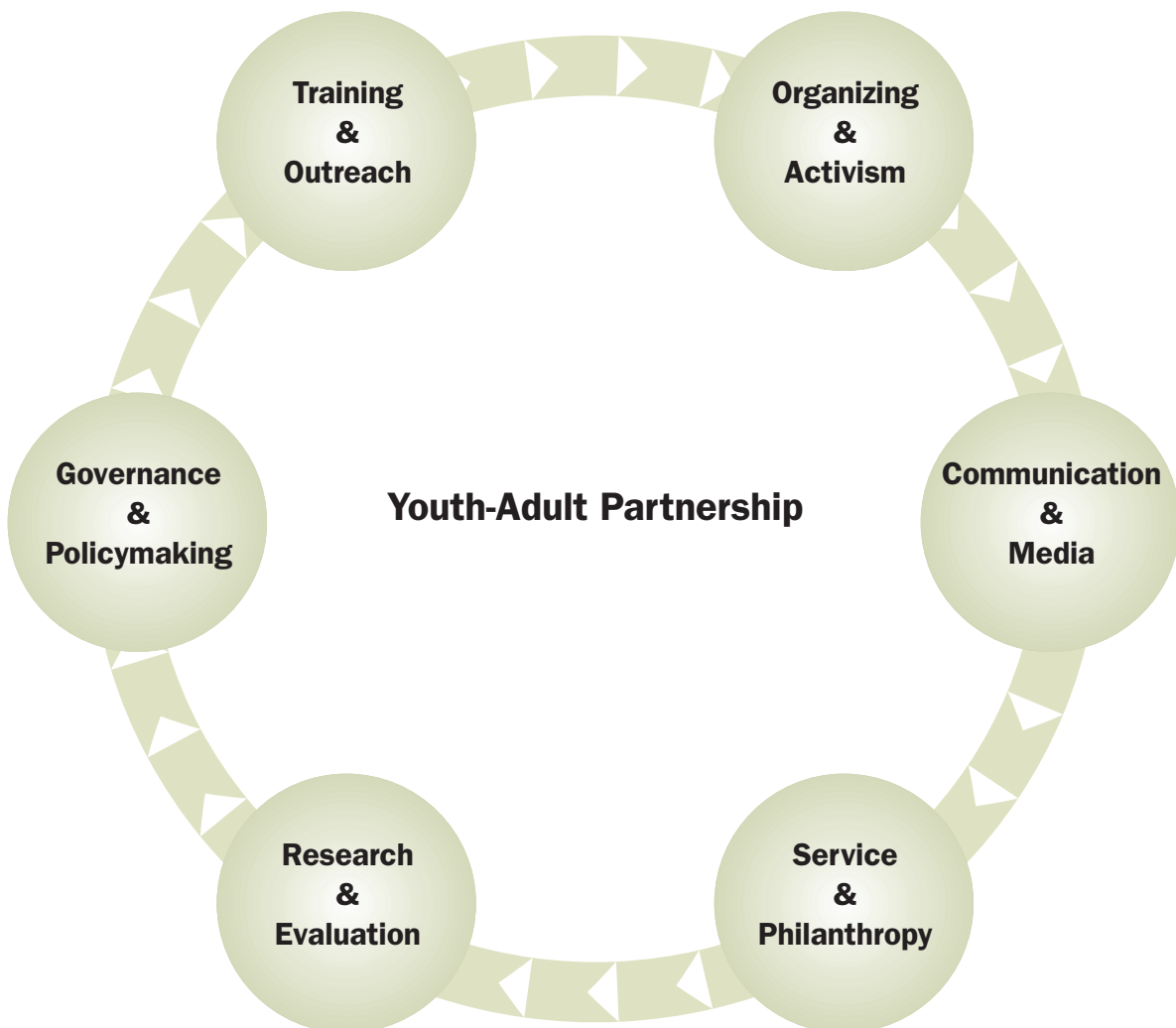
Where should
Y-AP occur within our
organization?



Necessary Knowledge

There are many organizational functions where youth can engage. These functions include training and outreach; governance and policy making; research and evaluation; service and philanthropy; communication and media; and organizing and activism.

Research indicates that positive youth development and positive organizational change occurs when youth engage in these functions. The challenge, therefore, is for the organization to decide in which functions it wants youth to participate.



Governance and Policymaking

If an organization serves young people, then it makes sense to have youth in key roles of organizational decision-making. Youth may serve on the board of directors or key committees, allowing their input to be heard on important organizational matters.

Training and Outreach

Youth can contribute significantly to training of adult staff and community members. At a minimum, adults benefit from hearing the youth perspective. But, adults also learn from observing youth at work. Youth often raise questions and issues that others may not have considered.

Organizing and Activism

Youth can work with staff to organize community members around issues. Youth often know how best to recruit youth to get involved with the organization. Adults can learn recruitment strategies from youth.

Communication and Media

Youth can offer much in helping the organization get its story out to the public. Youth can contribute to press releases, they can meet with reporters, they can facilitate public forums, they can create staff newsletters. The list goes on. Youth can use new media technologies to create and widely disseminate videos and to communicate through text directly to their own networks.

Service and Philanthropy

While they may not have much money to give, young people have time, experience, and skills to offer to others. Youth of all ages can serve as mentors for younger youth within their organizations or within the larger community. Youth can supervise program activities, and they can do one-on-one work. Almost all youth wish to give back to the “next generation.”

Research and Evaluation

Organizations are increasingly required by funders to demonstrate their accountability and accomplishments. Organizations are also using self-assessment strategies to explore program quality and to create program improvement plans. Youth can contribute to these efforts in many ways. Not only can they serve as “subjects,” giving their judgments on key organizational issues, but equally important, youth can serve as researchers. They can interview other youth and community members, work with staff to analyze the data, and help present it to organizational stakeholders.

Take Away Message

It’s important that the work youth engage in is of high priority to the organization. If youth are only invited to participate in minor issues, then youth engagement will never have a positive impact on youth or on the organization.



Chapter 3

Tools



Now it's time to consider how this information relates to your organization. There are three tools in this section:

- The first tool, *Identifying the Quality of Youth-Adult Partnership in Your Organization*, asks you to rate the quality of current youth engagement in your organization.
- The second tool, *Establishing a Goal*, asks you to develop a tentative goal for youth engagement.
- The final tool, *Considering Organizational Readiness*, has you assess whether your organization is prepared to accomplish your identified goal.

The tools in this section allow you to begin developing a vision for youth engagement in your organization.

Tool #6

Identifying the Quality of Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) in Your Organization



In Chapter One, you defined what “quality” Y-AP means to you and your organization. Using that definition, indicate the quality of Y-AP in each of the following organizational areas. Only circle “Not Applicable” if the function does not exist in your organization. If there is no youth engagement, but the function exists, circle one.

Areas of Y-AP	Quality of Y-AP					
	n/a	Low Quality			High Quality	
Governance and Policymaking	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
Training and Outreach	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
Organizing and Activism	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
Communication and Media	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
Service and Philanthropy	n/a	1	2	3	4	5
Research and Evaluation	n/a	1	2	3	4	5

Remember, the power is in the discussion. How do your assessments differ from your colleagues?

Tool #7

Establishing a Goal



This tool is the first critical step towards developing a vision for Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) in your organization. Be sure to include others in this process.

Step One: Identifying an Area for Y-AP

Review the previous activity, Identifying the Quality of Y-AP in Your Organization, and collectively identify one area where your organization would like to strengthen youth engagement. Explain why you chose this area.

Step Two: Develop a Goal Statement

Based on your above response, develop a goal statement for youth engagement in your organization. For example, if you identified “Research and Evaluation,” the goal statement might read:

Our goal is to involve youth in the research and evaluation of our current youth program.

Write your goal below:

Remember this is only an initial goal and it may change later.

Tool #8

Considering Organizational Readiness



Once your goal is established, it's necessary to consider if your organization is ready for the required work. Respond "yes" or "no" to the following questions to assess your organizational readiness.

Is the area you chose to strengthen Youth-Adult Partnership of high priority for your organization or program? **YES** **NO**

If the answer is *no*, is there another area of higher priority you might consider focusing on?

Do staff and youth have the knowledge and skills to successfully complete the work needed to accomplish the goal? **YES** **NO**

If the answer is *no*, what external resources are available to help you accomplish your goal?

Based on your above responses, is your goal the best area for engaging young people in your organization?


(If applicable) Our revised goal is:

Chapter Four



Essential Question:

How do we build
a culture of partnership
in our organization?



Necessary Knowledge

Clearly, Y-AP is a powerful approach for promoting youth development and strengthening organizations. An essential question, therefore, is this: How can organizations create a “culture” that allows Y-AP to flourish?

Recent research has explored this question. It identifies three pillars of organizational culture – values, structures, and collective action – that underlie effective Y-AP and positive outcomes.



partnership values

What are partnership values?

Organizations are able to successfully implement Y-AP when there is a shared value among everybody – board members, staff, young people – that all stakeholder groups have a right to have a voice in key organizational decisions. Strong partnership values exist when all staff and all youth believe that their perspective was considered. It does not mean that everybody got what they wanted, but that everybody feels their perspectives were heard. There is also a shared expectation that youth and adults should learn from each other and in respectful ways. They are expected to work through difficult issues, not around them.

How does one go about creating shared partnership values?

Most important is that the organizational leaders establish Y-AP as a core priority. Y-AP cannot be a side project. If organizational leaders do not actively endorse Y-AP, model it, and encourage others to engage in it, then it is unlikely to flourish. A second fundamental strategy is to make decision making a safe activity within the organization. Youth and staff have to feel safe to take on controversial issues. They have to be willing to address issues of trust and power when they arise.

Sustaining Partnership Values

- **Organizational leaders, by word and deed, establish youth-adult partnerships as a core priority, not a side project**
- **Youth and adults are expected to learn from one another**
- **The organization explicitly addresses issues of trust, power and authority**
- **Group processes foster “safe space” for respectful dialogue, problem solving and conflict resolution**
- **Organizational goals and actions have meaning in young people’s lives**
- **Adult staff encourage creative forms of self-expression and validate youth culture**
- **Programs foster collaboration, trust and collegiality; a sense that “it’s not all about me”**

partnership structures

What are partnership structures?

A culture of partnership can flourish when there are structures – established roles, processes and policies – that are supportive of Y-AP. Structures provide clarity. Structures set forth expectations and create processes for meeting these expectations. Such clarity is critical in that it removes the guesswork. It helps staff and youth manage their limited time and make the best use of available resources.

What are the types of structures that lead to successful Y-AP and positive outcomes?

The first strategy is key: organizations need to create multiple options for youth and adults to work together as partners. People have different interests and skills. They will participate best when they have some choice in how they can get involved. Also, everybody – staff and youth – like to “advance.” Once someone has mastered a certain role or taken on certain responsibilities for a while, it is important to have options for a new level of participation.

Structures have to be educational and developmental. Structures should exist to ensure that participants receive coaching and ongoing feedback. Organizations have to devote sufficient time and training to make sure that staff and youth have the proper motivation and ability to do what is necessary.

Sustaining Partnership Structures

- **Youth have multiple options for participation and receive the support to progressively take on more responsibility as they gain experience and skills**
- **There is clarity in the roles of youth and adults, as established by policy, position description, or compensation**
- **Youth and adults receive coaching and ongoing feedback**
- **The organization has established strategies to recruit and retain youth**
- **Organizational resources – budget, staff training, physical space – are aligned to support quality youth-adult partnerships**
- **Adults and youth each have the opportunity to reflect and learn with their same-age peers**

collective action

What is collective action?

The third pillar of an organizational culture of partnership is collective action. Talking and learning is not enough. Cultures can only get strong and be sustained when it's members – youth and staff – work collectively on issues of importance. This collective work can occur within the organization or within the larger community. What matters is that the participants feel as though they did it “together.” Collective action provides the foundation for continuity in spirit for organizations. It is through collective action that organizations are able to identify and implement their own “best practices.”

What types of collective action are most powerful in building a culture of partnership?

Most important is that the action be visible and public. There is something powerful about a group of people doing something together that is seen by others. It does not matter if it is highly visible to organizational or community stakeholders, the important thing is that it is a public action done outside of closed doors. Also important, of course, is that both youth and adults are seen as having influential roles in the collective action. One goal is to model youth-adult partnerships to the larger organization or community.

Collective action has to occur over time, it cannot be episodic. The power and influence of collective action grows over time. People involved in collective action need to know that they are part of something larger than themselves, something that is not just a “one shot” activity or “quick fix” solution.

Sustaining Collective Action

- **The action addresses issues that are of high priority to the organization in addition to being a priority for youth and adults**
- **Youth and adults are strategic in how they frame the issue, connect individual projects with larger initiatives and propose possible solutions**
- **The action is organized to facilitate intergenerational dialogue and collaborative effort**
- **The action puts youth in key communication roles to ensure that the youth perspective reaches leaders and constituent groups**
- **The work occurs over time, it is not episodic**
- **The work visibly models youth-adult partnerships to a larger audience**



Chapter 4

Tools



Now that you've thought about an organizational culture of partnership, it's time to apply the information to your own organization.

- The first tool in this section, *Assessing Organizational Culture*, asks you to identify current organizational strengths and weaknesses.
- The second tool, *Steps to Strengthen Organizational Culture*, allows you to develop concrete steps to improve organizational culture.

Tool #9

Assessing Organizational Culture



Refer back to the “Necessary Knowledge” section to get ideas of specific partnership values, structures, and actions. Now apply this information to identify strengths and weaknesses within your organization. Which partnership values, structures, and actions are strengths of your organization? Which are weaknesses?

Partnership Values

Organizational Strengths



Organizational Weaknesses



Partnership Structures

Organizational Strengths



Organizational Weaknesses



Tool #10

Steps to Strengthen Organizational Culture



It's time to think strategically about how your organization might work to enhance its organizational strengths and address organizational weaknesses. The following steps should be completed collectively with others in your organization.

Step One: Identify Organizational Strengths

Identify one or two organizational strengths you might work to enhance:

1. _____

2. _____

Step Two: Identify Key Weaknesses

Identify one or two specific weaknesses that you believe are a priority to address:

1. _____

2. _____

Step Three: Brainstorm Potential Action Steps

Based on the above, brainstorm potential action steps that might help your organization build on its strengths and address the identified weaknesses. Be sure to use active verbs at the beginning of each sentence (i.e. schedule, attend, implement).

Step Four: Evaluate the Options

Review the list of potential action steps and place an asterisk next to the four of five steps you believe are most important.

Step Five: Identify Who's Responsible and When it will be Done

Identify who's responsible for each of the action steps. Then develop a timeline for when the actions will be done. For example, if your organization decided a meeting is necessary, who is responsible for calling the meeting? Creating the agenda? When will each be done?

Write the action, the person responsible, and when it will be done below:

Action Step	Who Is Responsible	Time Frame

Chapter Five



Essential Question:

How do we manage
organizational change
toward Y-AP?



Necessary Knowledge

Strong organizational management is essential in order to incorporate and sustain the innovative practice of Y-AP.

But how exactly do effective organizations manage innovation?

Effective organizations promote and sustain Y-AP by consistently concentrating on three goals: focusing on the bottom line of Y-AP, walking the talk of Y-AP, and making Y-AP standard operating procedure. To achieve each goal, organizations rely on core strategies.

Goals

Focus on the Bottom Line of Y-AP

Maintain stakeholder attention of the purpose and desired outcomes of Y-AP

Walk the Talk of Y-AP

Ensure that stakeholders can translate a vision of Y-AP into quality practice

Make Y-AP Standard Operating Procedure

Build a sense of shared ownership of Y-AP among stakeholders



Strategies

Champions

Garner the support of influential persons who are willing and able to advocate for Y-AP

Knowledge

Provide access to research, program models, and best practices through training and consultation

Infrastructure

Ensure that policies, structures, and monies are aligned to support Y-AP

Social Networks

Build awareness of Y-AP through personal and professional relationships

Personal Experience

Coach stakeholders as they directly experience and observe Y-AP

Role Identification

Establish clear responsibilities and expectations for youth and adult stakeholders

Self-Interest

Connect Y-AP with existing priorities and responsibilities of stakeholders

Reflection

Facilitate group reflection and strategic planning on issues of implementation and quality.

Collective Story

Fit Y-AP within the larger narrative by highlighting the contributions of youth to organizational success

Goal One:

Focus on the Bottom Line of Y-AP

Effective organizations focus on the bottom line of Y-AP. Staff work to articulate the purpose and benefits of engaging youth as partners. But this is not enough to sustain a focus. Staff must also recruit other advocates in the organization and community. They are always “planting seeds” to build consensus around the purpose and anticipated impacts of Y-AP.

How do organizations focus on the bottom line of Y-AP? Three core strategies are typically used: *champions*, *social networks* and *self-interest*.

One or two individuals cannot be the sole supporters of Y-AP. They need to recruit other advocates to spread the word about the purpose and benefits of engaging youth. To do this, staff build support from *champions* and *social networks*.

Champions are individuals, with some institutional power, that are willing to use their resources and capital to advocate for Y-AP. Regardless of their formal position, champions help focus others’ attention on the main purpose and outcomes of engaging youth. Staff also spend a significant amount of time activating their own *social networks*. Social networks allow staff to build alliances and gain access to new groups of supporters.

Staff strategically present their message and vision of Y-AP to champions and social networks. They connect Y-AP with the *self-interest* of potential supporters by helping them identify how this innovative practice relates to their organization’s current priorities, interests, and goals. Connecting to the self-interest of potential supporters creates initial buy-in and helps sustain efforts over time.

Focusing on the bottom line of Y-AP is critical not only in the early stages of implementation, but throughout the entire initiative. In order to sustain this practice, staff must remember why the organization decided to invite youth to participate and what they hope to gain from youth participation. Without constant attention on the purpose and outcomes of Y-AP, organizations risk relapsing into old habits.

“Just planting the seed, and looking at how to provide the training and support to continue to have a strong youth-adult partnership on the board, is what I see our role as. It’s helping them keep that focus.”
—Adult Staff Member of a Youth-Serving Agency

“You [a staff person] can have all the skills and all the knowledge, but if you don’t have the willingness to share and to develop some kind of a network of relationship that continues to expand the idea [of YAP], then it won’t work.”
—Adult Staff Member of a Youth-Serving Agency

VOICES
from the Field

Goal Two: Walk the Talk of Y-AP

Organizations not only “plant seeds” and create initial buy-in for Y-AP. They also teach and model how to effectively engage young people as partners or colleagues. In other words, staff walk the talk of Y-AP. This is accomplished through three core strategies: *knowledge*, *personal experience* and *reflection*.

Staff provide training and workshops to enhance the *knowledge* and skills of others in their organization. Engaging young people as partners may be new to many individuals, so they need to be informed of best practices and effective strategies. Staff may rely on external resources – such as state or local workshops, handbooks (like Y-AP Savvy) or sample policies from other organizations – to build the knowledge and skills of others.

But workshops and trainings are just one part of learning. Adults learn best through *personal experience*, actually working in partnership with youth. This hands-on practice in real world settings allows adult stakeholders to develop the confidence and competence to meaningfully engage young people. It also allows adults to more fully understand the benefits and challenges of Y-AP.

The direct experience of working with young people needs to be balanced with time for *reflection*. Reflection allows individuals to discuss best practices and implementation issues related to Y-AP on a consistent basis. Opportunities for reflective practice range from group retreats to focused small group work and self-evaluations. Obviously, it is more challenging to find time for staff retreats, so organizations typically allocate shorter amounts of time for reflective practices. For example, organizations may incorporate time for youth and adults to get to know each other on a personal level while concurrently completing small tasks and reflection.

It boils down to this: effective organizations recognize that Y-AP is best taught through a continuous cycle of learning, action, and reflection. Therefore, they allocate sufficient time and resources for adult learning. They typically spend the most amount of time investing in this second goal.

“You can help people be aware of their own biases, you can help people understand what the obstacles are, you can help them to see what the gifts are, but until people see and experience [Y-AP] in a successful way, it's not likely to happen. It's only when they've had that experience.”
—Adult Staff Member of a Youth-Serving Agency

“We are given equal opportunity to speak and to vote on subject matters, we can present anything that we want to at the meetings as long as it pertains to the board. I mean we're free to add anything to the agenda we see fit to, we are allowed to speak at anytime. We are given the same responsibility as the adults are, and we are expected to carry it through and report back.”
—Youth Serving on a County Board

VOICES
from the Field

Goal Three:

Make Y-AP Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Staff constantly strive to transition Y-AP from a practice they advocate, to standard operating procedure (SOP) within the organization. Obviously this is a challenging process. The most successful organizations are those who focus on this goal from the beginning and continue to prioritize it throughout the implementation process. This goal is activated through three core strategies: *infrastructure*, *role identification*, and *collective story*.

Effective organizations focus on building an *infrastructure* that supports Y-AP. They work collectively to develop policies and procedures that guide youth engagement. Issues such as the recruitment and training of young people, funding, or voting policies may need to be collectively developed. Establishing an infrastructure is an on-going process and task; it does not happen in one day or even one week.

In addition to establishing an infrastructure to support Y-AP, effective organizations clearly identify and articulate roles. *Role identification* provides young people and adults with a clear understanding of how they are expected to participate and what they are expected to achieve. Clarity also promotes a sense of stability and collectivism among youth and adults.

Lastly, organizations use *collective stories* as a rallying point through which staff can share their successes with Y-AP and articulate their vision of quality practice. As Y-AP becomes increasingly integrated into organizational practices, stories are collectively created and shared, helping to reinforce the established infrastructure and sustain the initiative.

Ultimately, staff focus attention on both organizational structures and stories in order to make Y-AP a part of their standard operating procedure.

Take Away Message

Effective organizations keep highly focused on three key management goals:

- **Focus on the Bottom Line of Y-AP**
- **Walk the Talk of Y-AP**
- **Make Y-AP a Standard Operating Procedure**



Chapter 5

Tools



It's time to clarify how you will initiate and sustain Y-AP.

There are two tools in this section:

- The first tool, *Identifying and Mobilizing Your Allies*, allows you to identify internal and external resources that will help to sustain Y-AP.
- The second tool, *Creating a Structure*, provides a template for discussing current structures and future priorities.

Tool #11

Identifying and Mobilizing Your Allies



Complete the following chart. Remember, it is necessary to discuss these questions with your colleagues.

Core Strategies	Internal (organization)	External (organization)
<p>What individuals and groups (i.e. “champions” and “social networks”) are most important to focus on?</p>		
<p>How will you appeal to the self-interest of champions and social networks? What Y-AP benefits will you highlight?</p>		
<p>What people and training materials are available to build the knowledge and skills of those involved in Y-AP?</p>		

Tool #12

Creating a Structure for Your Allies



The following questions help you to identify current structures and future priorities. As always, be sure to discuss your responses with your colleagues.


Core Strategies	Current	Future
Infrastructure	What policies and procedures guide youth participation in your organization?	What policies and procedures need to be developed?
Role Identification	Who is responsible for ensuring the key tasks get done?	Who will be involved in this process in the future?
Collective Story	When people talk about youth engagement in your organization, what are the stories and examples they typically use?	What kinds of stories would you like told in the future?

Chapter Six



Essential Question:

How can quality Y-AP
be sustained
in our organization?



Necessary Knowledge

We would like to offer our congratulations. If you are reading this text, and have engaged in a meaningful way with the previous five chapters, you assuredly are in a better position to help the youth and adults with whom you work. It is hard to find the time to engage in learning and reflection processes.

This may be a good time to take a break, to not focus on Y-AP for a while, and to give yourself time to recharge.

When you come back to Y-AP, it might be good to focus on the question: How can quality Y-AP be sustained in our organization? We offer two directions. The first is *visibility and celebration*. The second is *continuous learning and quality improvement*.

Visibility and Celebration of Y-AP

Given the prevailing norms in the United States – that young people need not be vital contributors to their communities, and that adults can do just fine by themselves – the adoption of Y-AP as a core operating principle for organizations and institutions will require substantial policy support at the national and state levels. Ultimately, however, the wide-scale adoption of Y-AP, as with any social innovation, will depend on building the capacity of community organizations.

The most effective way to sustain a social innovation such as Y-AP is to continue to talk about it within the organization. Keep it explicitly on the agenda. This is why almost all of the tools in this Primer direct you to talk to your colleagues and to youth in your organization. When Y-AP is made visible, it takes on a life of its own. When Y-AP is talked about, it can grow. Research shows that effective organizations create a shared narrative about the power of Y-AP and its place within the organization. These shared narratives, in turn, provide an origin story for Y-AP within the organization, a set of positive metaphors, and a rationale for the innovative practice. Further, these shared narratives allow stakeholders – youth and adults alike – to locate their own place and role within Y-APs. The everyday workplace culture is thus influenced and newly constructed. Y-AP becomes something to be celebrated.

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

Sustaining Y-AP also requires that your organization commit to continuous learning and quality improvement. As with any other practice, Y-AP can become stale and ineffective if it is not updated. Moreover, there is always turnover. Staff and youth move on with time. By employing strategies of continuous learning and quality improvement, organizations can, over time, bring new voices and energy to Y-AP. These strategies allow the organization to collectively reflect on Y-AP, allowing the organization to maintain that which is working, and creating new approaches to replace what is not working.

Within organizations, individuals are always learning. Learning is maximized through opportunities to share individual knowledge and experience with others. As work becomes more and more complex, however, it becomes essential to create structures that support continuous learning. Stewart (1997) says it best:

“As organizations adopt partnerships models of learning, individual experience becomes a less reliable basis for learning. An organization needs to foster teamwork, communities of practice, and other social forms of learning. Individual talent is great, but it walks out the door... Interdisciplinary teams capture, formalize, and capitalize talent, because it becomes shared, less dependent on any individual.”

In creating structures for continuous learning and quality improvement, the primary goal is to create an environment that supports evaluative inquiry. This means that the organization should do what it can to create structures where organizational members (adults and youth):

- have accurate and complete information
- have an appreciation for past experiences
- are free from coercion and distorting self perceptions
- be open to alternative perspectives
- be able to reflect critically on presuppositions and their consequences
- have an opportunity to apply what has been learned
- have an opportunity to integrate new learning with what is already known

Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE): A Practical Guide for Program Assessment and Action Planning

First published in 2004, *Youth and Adults Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE): A Practical Guide for Program Assessment and Action Planning*, is a comprehensive resource kit for continuous learning and quality improvement. We created *YALPE* to be consistent with the principles of evaluative inquiry listed above.

YALPE is designed to help organizations enhance the quality of their programs by engaging youth-adult partnerships in program assessment and program development processes. Specifically, it provides a structured, easy-to-use strategy for organizations to conduct a rigorous assessment of their programs. More importantly, *YALPE* guides organizations through the process of using the results of the assessment for program planning and improvement. And, finally, the resource kit details ways that organizations can use the findings to help gain support from key constituencies, such as funders and community leaders.

YALPE is designed using proven strategies of continuous learning and quality improvement. It walks users through the primary tasks of assessment and program improvement: planning and preparing to conduct a program assessment, collecting and compiling data, analyzing and understanding data, sharing results with your organization, making sense of assessment findings, action planning, and communicating results to key stakeholders.

YALPE contains a wide variety of tools, such as survey instruments, planning tools, facilitation tips, and other implementation guides. It walks youth and adults through five phases of evaluative inquiry and organizational improvement:

- planning and preparing to conduct a program assessment
- collecting and compiling data
- analyzing and understanding the data
- sharing results with the organization
- action planning and follow up

While *YALPE* is designed as a “complete package,” we have found that many organizations pick and choose the tools they wish to use. Some organizations, for example, are looking for assistance on how to collect data. Others are more interested in how to get the organization, as a whole, to make sense of assessment findings. Still others use *YALPE* as a guide for how to communicate findings to their constituencies.

We recommend *YALPE*, obviously, because we developed it. There are other excellent resource guides available. These guides are included in the “Resources and References” section at the end.

Our aim here is not to promote *YALPE*. *Rather, our aim is to promote continuous learning and program improvement.* The research is clear. When organizations engage in such practices, their programs become stronger. Program leaders, staff, and youth have known this for years. The challenge remains to find the time to engage in continuous learning and program improvement. We hope that this Primer has offered some useful information and tools toward helping you meet that challenge.

Take Away Message

Successful organizations sustain Y-AP by continuously learning, and of course, engaging in frequent celebration.



Chapter 6

Tools



The final two tools focus on celebrating and sustaining Y-AP:

- The first tool, *Celebrating Y-AP*, provides ideas on how to make Y-AP visible within your organization.
- The second tool, *Pulling it Together*, helps you organize and finalize your plan for strengthening youth engagement.

Tool #13

Celebrating Y-AP



At this point, your organization has worked hard to incorporate Y-AP. It's time to have some fun and acknowledge your accomplishments. Consider the below ideas and determine how your organization would like to celebrate success. We encourage you to generate your own ideas too. And, as always, your decisions should be made in consultation with both youth and adult colleagues.

How will your organization celebrate and highlight Y-AP?



Tool #14

Pulling it Together



At this point, your organization has spent a lot of time planning and preparing to strengthen youth engagement. This last tool is intended to help you organize your plan.

Refer back to the necessary chapters in order to answer each of the following questions. If your plan has altered since completing the previous tools, simply include the updated information here.

Goal Statement (Identified in Chapter #3):

Where would your organization like to strengthen youth engagement? If necessary, feel free to adjust your previously stated goal statement to align with your current plans.

Expected Impacts (Identified in Chapter #2):

What are the impacts your organization is working towards?

Impacts on Youth:

Impacts on Adults:

Impacts on Organization:

Impacts on Community:

Strengths and Weaknesses of Organizational Culture (Identified in Chapter #4):

What organizational strengths are you working to enhance?

What organizational weaknesses are planning to address?

Action Steps (Identified in Chapter #4 and Chapter #5):

What steps will you take to reach your organization’s goal? How will you enhance your organizational strengths and improve weakness? Who will be responsible for each task? Be sure to include action steps identified in both chapters four and five.

Action Step	Person Responsible

Celebrating Y-AP (Identified in Chapter #6):

How will you celebrate Y-AP?

Engaging in Continuous Learning (Identified in Chapter #6):

How will you monitor your success? What toolkits, if any, do you plan to use?

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