



Youth-Adult Partnership Resource Kit

Tools and Inspiration for
Organizations and Communities

Compiled by

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Why Youth-Adult Partnership?

Dear Rural Resident,

Across Oregon and Siskiyou County, Calif., rural community leaders express the same concern: How do we engage the next generation of leadership?

Youth-Adult Partnership can be a powerful tool for youth engagement and organizational improvement. By forming authentic partnerships with youth and sharing decision-making responsibilities and power, Youth-Adult Partnership provides a framework for collaboration across generations. Both youth and adults benefit from skill building while working toward a shared goal.

Youth-Adult Partnership additionally promotes intentionally inclusive practices. The populations of our rural communities are increasingly diverse in terms of race, culture, language and ethnicity. Organizational approaches to decision making that value and elevate the voices of rural youth also ensure greater relevancy and more equitable outcomes.

This Youth-Adult Partnership Resource Kit is intended for community leaders, youth development professionals, and K-12 educators and administrators. It targets any ally to youth who is interested in organizational improvement and new avenues and strategies for authentic youth engagement. I hope you will find inspiration in this kit and explore Youth-Adult Partnership as a tool to incorporate into your professional practice.

Please share these resources with the young people you know. Additional copies of this Resource Kit are available through The Ford Family Foundation's Select Books program (www.tfff.org/select-books). A PDF version is also available.

Thank you for all you do to support rural youth as well as The Ford Family Foundation's mission.

With hope for our future,

Mandy Elder
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Cover: Participants engage at the Youth-Adult Partnerships in Action convening held at The Ford Family Foundation. Photo by Katie Tripp

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1: Creating Inclusive and Effective Environments for Young People: Exploring Youth Voice and Youth-Adult Partnership (6 pages)

Introduction to Youth-Adult Partnership created by an Education Northwest researcher in conjunction with the Institute for Youth Success. Includes explanation of Youth-Adult Partnership's benefits, tips and additional resources.

2: Y-AP Convening Proceedings (4 pages)

Summary document from the Youth-Adult Partnerships in Action convening held at The Ford Family Foundation. Includes recommendations for cultivating a culture of partnership in your organization and action steps.

3: Being Y-AP Savvy: A Primer on Creating & Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships (63 pages)

Comprehensive manual for all adults and youth hoping to enhance their professional practice by incorporating Youth-Adult Partnership.

4: Ladder of Participation (2 pages)

Graphic representation and explanation of the stages of youth involvement in organizational decision-making.

5: Youth-Adult Partnerships Rubric: A Tool for Professional Development and Program Evaluation in Youth Settings (15 pages)

Self-assessment tool that can be utilized as a means for evaluating organizational structures and processes to strengthening Youth-Adult Partnership practices in youth settings.

6: Youth-Adult Partnerships in Community Decision Making: What Does It Take to Engage Adults in the Practice? (4 pages)

Summary document from nationwide research identifying challenges to effective Youth-Adult Partnership and strategies for community governance and organizational decision making. Includes review of relevant theory and research.

7: Youth-Adult Partnerships in Public Action: Principles, Organizational Culture & Outcomes (48 pages)

Research exploring how organizations cultivate and sustain a culture of Youth-Adult Partnership. Document includes two organizational case studies.

8: Recommended Resources

Creating Inclusive and Effective Environments for Young People: Exploring **Youth Voice** and **Youth-Adult Partnership**

Everyone Benefits When Youth Are Consulted

An effective and evidenced-based way to improve schools, nonprofits, and government agencies is to learn from the perspective of those being served. Research has shown that giving youth a voice results in increased feelings of engagement and ownership. For example, students who believe they have a voice in school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice.ⁱ



What Is Youth-Adult Partnership?

Gathering feedback from young people and using that feedback to improve services is a best practice for all youth-serving organizations. But that only scratches the surface. Out-of-school time programs, community-based organizations, and local government agencies can all benefit from the intentional inclusion of youth in their policies, programs, and structures.

Figure 1. Youth-Adult Partnership Settings and Activities



Source: Adapted from Zeldin, Petrokubi, & MacNeil, 2007.

Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) is defined as a group of youth and adults working together to make decisions and take action on important issues.ⁱⁱ Y-AP is not a specific program model or curriculum. Instead, it is a set of principles and practices that may be applied to a wide range of settings and activities (Figure 1). Y-AP is not just about giving young people a voice, it's about shared decision-making. In Y-AP settings, youth are increasingly serving alongside adults as facilitators and educators, board members, researchers, media producers, community organizers, and fundraisers.

Y-AP is a fundamental strategy for positive youth development. The use of empowering practice is a core competency for youth workers,ⁱⁱⁱ and youth participation in decision-making is a key indicator of youth program quality. For example, it is a core feature of many assessments that measure high-quality out-of-school-time environments, such as A Program Assessment System (APAS) from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA).

However, many organizations struggle to move beyond voice—occasionally asking youth for input or feedback on decisions that adults make—to a more meaningful engagement of young people in authentic decision-making, where young people work alongside adults over time to grapple with real-world issues and choices.^{iv} Research suggests that youth experience higher levels of empowerment when there is this type of “shared control” among youth and adults.^v

Why Does Youth-Adult Partnership Matter?

A synergy happens when both youth and adults are expected to contribute their resources and perspectives toward a common goal.^{vi} Through mutual learning and collective action, Y-AP has powerful influences on youth empowerment, adult development, organizational effectiveness, and community issues.

Figure 2. Youth-Adult Partnership Promotes Thriving Youth, Programs, and Communities



Source: Petrokubi, 2014.

Four core principles underlie Y-AP: authentic decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocity, and community connectedness.^{vii} Each principle works together to create a dynamic environment with thriving youth.

Reflecting on your program, school, or organization, consider:

- To what degree do youth have the authority to make decisions that matter to themselves and others?
- What are some settings in which youth work alongside adults who share their interests?
- How do youth and adults learn from each other?
- How do we foster a sense of belonging?
- How do we help young people feel like they have a role to play in our community?

How Can We Grow Youth-Adult Partnership Within Our Organization?

Y-AP challenges adults to think differently about their role in relationship to youth. Some adult partners adopt a mindset of “leading from behind,”^{viii} which involves making space for youth to step into roles and responsibilities previously reserved for adults. Both youth and adults need support and scaffolding for this type of relationship. Effective organizations take steps to align their norms and structures to build a “culture of Y-AP” in which young people participate in multiple aspects of decision-making.^{ix}

Just like adults, young people want the freedom to choose where and how they engage in decision-making. Not every young person is interested in becoming a board member. There are many ways youth and adults can share decision-making in everyday settings such as afterschool programs and classrooms. These opportunities can help lay the foundation for Y-AP in less typical settings, such as organizational operations and management.

Table 1. How Are Decisions Currently Being Made in Your Organization?

| | <i>Adults control</i> | <i>Youth and adults share control</i> | <i>Youth control</i> |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Decisions in settings where there are more youth than adults | | | |
| Establishment of group norms and expectations | | | |
| Management of conflict | | | |
| Recruitment of new program participants | | | |
| Use of space | | | |
| Program development and curriculum design | | | |
| Facilitation of program activities | | | |
| Planning of special events | | | |
| Decisions in settings where there are more adults than youth | | | |
| Fundraising | | | |
| Communications and outreach | | | |
| Governance and policy | | | |
| Evaluation | | | |
| Staff hiring, orientation, and evaluation | | | |

Why Should You Invest in Promoting Youth-Adult Partnership?

Y-AP is an issue of social justice. This is expressed in the saying “Nothing about us, without us.” Participation can be viewed as a basic human right that should not be denied to children because of their age.^x For example, Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that the views of children should be taken into consideration in accordance with their age and maturity. Many countries that ratified the convention have institutionalized youth participation in public institutions.^{xi,xii} In the United States, many youth organizers view equal participation as a social justice issue and make it a central part of how they operate.

Y-AP strengthens democratic society. By actively participating in group decision-making, young people develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need to be active and engaged community members.^{xiii,xiv} Research suggests that Y-AP plays a role in bridging the “civic empowerment gap.”^{xv} Participation in collective action may cultivate the agency and sociopolitical development of underrepresented youth.^{xvi} In addition to preparing youth to lead in the future, Y-AP strengthens communities today, by promoting more responsive public policy and more inclusive community institutions.^{xvii, xviii, xix, xx}

Y-AP is developmentally responsive practice. Youth thrive in settings that support their ability to make a difference. Like adults, they want to feel a sense of purpose, and they want to engage in activities that make a meaningful contribution to their community.^{xxi,xxii,xxiii} Programs that provide opportunities for Y-AP may see higher retention and engagement.^{xxiv,xxv} Quality Y-AP cultivates a sense of self-efficacy and belonging and promotes the development of skills such as strategic thinking, group process, and leadership.^{xxvi,xxvii, xxviii, xxix}

Youth-Adult Partnership in Schools

A growing body of research has documented the benefits of school-based Y-AP. Schools that use a Y-AP framework have documented enhanced student-teacher relationships,^{xxx} improved school climate,^{xxxi} and improved instruction and curriculum.^{xxxii} Y-AP reminds teachers, administrators, and parents that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives that can bring to light issues that may otherwise go unnoticed and often provide the most effective strategies for addressing those issues.^{xxxiii} There are many ways in which schools can build Y-AP into their planning, including practices that focus on the classroom, school, district, or even state.

Tips for Educators and Youth Workers

1. Reflect on how youth are currently engaged with different aspects of your programming, decision-making, and operations. Are there opportunities for more youth involvement? What are they?
2. Advocate for the importance of a youth perspective. For example, push for the meaningful inclusion of youth in policymaking and governance.
3. Practice scaffolding—break down projects and actions into their component parts to help youth understand the full scope of a project and how they can effectively contribute to its success.
4. Consider how to strengthen the training, coaching, and professional development provided to your staff, so they learn to gradually take a more supporting role.
5. Examine the options available to young people. Too few options and too many options can both be problematic.
6. Hire staff members that already understand the importance of youth voice and Y-AP.
7. Realize that effective Y-AP is built upon relationships and a communal sense of belonging. How can you build strong youth-adult relationships and promote that sense of belonging?
8. Make sure you gather a broad range of youth perspectives, not just those of high-achieving or well-connected young people.

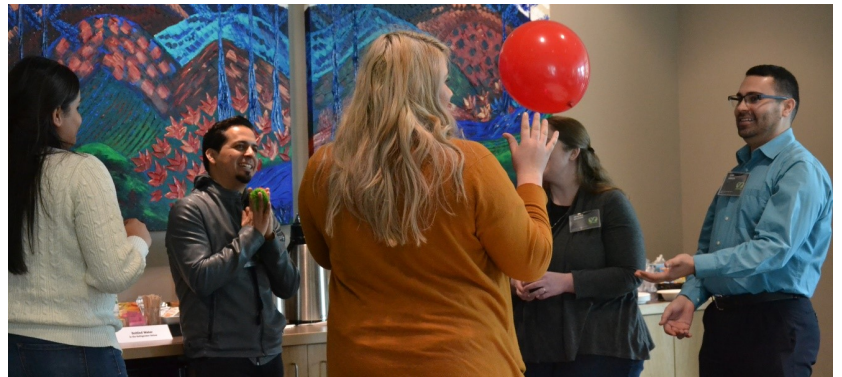
Endnotes

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Youth-Adult Partnerships in Action

A statewide convening hosted by The Institute for Youth Success and The Ford Family Foundation

March 26, 2018 - Roseburg, Oregon

WHY YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP?

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.*

Y-AP lifts up the unique contributions of everyone in collective work. Y-AP can be utilized for organizational improvement, to increase youth engagement, and to create **stronger and more impactful relationships** between youth and adults. Everyone benefits when youth are consulted.

In rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, Calif., youth-adult partnership holds benefits for young people and our communities including **better school performance**, increased **youth participation in and contributions to community building**, and **greater investment in long-term community belonging**.

The Youth-Adult Partnerships in Action convening was held to recognize the strengths of rural Oregon's youth-serving organizations and begin different kinds of local and statewide conversations - **conversations that include youth at the table**. In doing so, adult participants increased their capacity to listen to, incorporate, and **elevate of youth voice** and young leaders had the opportunity to **connect and dream**.

As an example of youth-adult partnership, participants collaborated to analyze and create recommendations for the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey. Moving forward, this analysis will be presented to the Oregon Health Authority as we continue building organizational and community capacity to develop meaningful partnerships with youth.

*Adapted from: Zeldin & Collura 2010 - *Being Y-AP Savvy: A primer on creating & sustaining youth-adult partnerships*

Rural Youth Organizations Leading our Communities

Camp Lead
CAPACES Leadership Institute
College Dreams
Cottage Grove Youth Advisory Council
Cow Creek Tribal Youth Council
Juntos
Project Brave Food Pantry
Roseburg High School
The Boys and Girls Clubs of the Umpqua Valley
Winston Area Community Partnership
Siskiyou County Youth Media Team
Youth ERA

Roseburg - Winston - Sutherlin - Reedsport - Corvallis
McMinnville - Dayton - Woodburn - Grants Pass
Weed - Yreka - Cottage Grove - Medford - McCloud
Oakland

Attendees at the convening included:

29 young rural leaders

21 adult allies

“ I believe that allowing the two different age groups to work together is really *empowering* and can really benefit both groups by opening their eyes to the world and showing them that **everyone’s opinion matters.**”

-young leader



Youth-Adult Partnerships in Rural Youth ERA

Youth ERA works to provide accessible support services to all young people.

We focus on **direct service, training, and advocacy** — the building blocks for creating lasting change for young people in communities across the country.

“Youth ERA doesn’t just pick a peer support for us. **The youth choose who they work with...** Youth ERA also lets the youth choose the kinds of programs to have. Like one Drop has a virtual reality center — another a stage. Youth ERA also creates opportunities for youth to volunteer or find work.”

— Kim, Youth ERA Medford Drop

Youth-Adult Partnership in Action at The Ford Family Foundation

The event was planned in partnership with Douglas County youth and considering developmentally responsive practices. For example:

- ◆ Collaboration with local high school students to create the logo and theme that set the event's tone
- ◆ Youth in Reedsport were consulted regarding content
- ◆ Youth-friendly hours were prioritized - 10am start time!
- ◆ Snacks and beverages were made available
- ◆ Unstructured time for youth connections was provided
- ◆ A Youth Media Team and youth photographer were hired to document and provide coverage of the event
- ◆ Youth wrote biographies to include in the conference program to be able to share on their own terms
- ◆ When possible, youth co-facilitated activities
- ◆ Norms to support youth voice were established and utilized

Organizational Norms to Support Youth-Adult Partnership

"First before seconds" - everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice

"Youth speak first" - all youth speak before adults

W.A.I.T. (Why Am I Talking? Why Aren't I Talking?) - method for self check-in

Assume that everyone has an experience they'd like to share

Positive self talk - refrain from using put downs to yourself and others

"Vegas rules" - what happens here, stays here

Adult and Youth Action Steps Toward Partnerships

“Togetherness is not just a word, it's an action.”

-participant



EVALUATE: How are young people already included in decision making? What opportunities exist? What interests young people? Start with what you know, and build on what you have.

CULTIVATE ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: Youth workers and educators expressed a need for “buy-in” from administration, board members, and supervisors in order to affect organizational policy.

BE BRAVE: Because youth-adult partnership requires rethinking systems and sometimes policy, adults shared a need for greater understanding of policymaking procedures. Branch out!

SPEAK UP: Young leaders want support from adult partners to know how and when to speak up. #youthvoice

INVITE MORE YOUTH: Meetings, program planning, and events can all benefit from including more young leaders. Youth participants want to invite more friends to the table!

CREATE SPACE AND TIME: Promote accessibility and inclusion!



Creating a Culture of Youth-Adult Partnership in Your Organization

Fostering youth-adult partnership organizational culture requires commitment from all stakeholders - youth, adults, boards, administration - to create an environment of ongoing learning and mutual benefit. With time, Y-AP proves to be a powerful tool to strengthen organizations and promote positive youth development. Here are some ways to begin building a culture of youth-adult partnership in your organization or agency:

- ◆ Identify a variety of opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making. **Ask youth about what matters to them**, and support them to pursue their best path.
- ◆ Invite youth to participate in meetings. Prepare them and yourself to provide them with a **platform to speak!**
- ◆ Plan meetings at **times and locations that are convenient for youth**. This may require “after hours” meetings to accommodate for other activities (sports, extracurricular clubs, employment) and location changes.
- ◆ Provide **snacks or meals** as necessary.
- ◆ Plan dynamic activities that use a **strengths-based approach** and reflect the skills and interests of youth.
- ◆ Build trust through **brave and respectful dialogue**. See “Organizational Norms to Support Youth-Adult Partnership.”



Additional Resources

Being Y-AP Savvy: A Primer on Creating & Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships - <https://fyi.uwex.edu/youthadulthoodpartnership/files/8677/68/YAP-Savvy12.pdf>

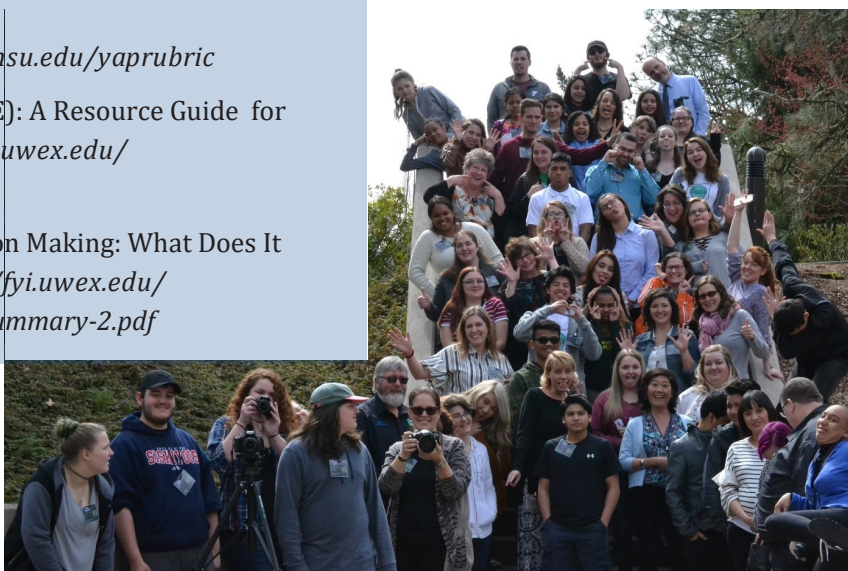
Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric - <https://cerc.msu.edu/yaprubric>

Youth-Adult Partnerships in Evaluation (Y-AP/E): A Resource Guide for Translating Research into Practice - <https://fyi.uwex.edu/youthadulthoodpartnership/resource-guide/>

Youth-Adult Partnerships in Community Decision Making: What Does It Take to Engage Adults in the Practice? - <https://fyi.uwex.edu/youthadulthoodpartnership/files/2011/07/YIGExecSummary-2.pdf>

SHOUT OUTS! All photos featured in this publication were taken by Katy Tripp from Oakland, Oregon on location at The Ford Family Foundation, March 26, 2018.

The Y-AP logo featured on the front page was co-created with Roseburg High School students Emma, Lucy, Tim, Dairon, and Michelle.



Being Y-AP Savvy

A Primer on Creating & Sustaining
Youth-Adult Partnerships



Shepherd Zeldin
and
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Center for Nonprofits, University of Wisconsin-Madison
4-H Youth Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension

**Being Y-AP Savvy
A Primer on Creating
& Sustaining
Youth-Adult Partnerships**

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This manual represents the work of many practitioners, researchers and youth with whom we have collaborated and learned from over the past decade. Our contribution has been to reflect on this wealth of experience, collect and analyze data, and synthesize all of it in a way that makes it useful for the field.

Shepherd Zeldin (rszeldin@wisc.edu) is the Rothermel Bascom Professor of Human Ecology, Co-Director of the Wisconsin Center for Nonprofits, and a Youth Development Specialist for Wisconsin Extension, all at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jessica Collura is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in human development and family studies whose work focuses on community leadership. She conducts research on youth organizing, youth engagement in community networks, and best practices in youth-adult partnerships.

Linda Camino, an independent scholar, has taken the lead in much of the theory and research presented here. Her insights about youth-adult partnerships and her observations about how they are implemented through community based programming and through community coalitions, are reflected in all aspects of this manual.

Julie Petrokubi, a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Director of Programs at Camp Fire in Portland, Oregon, has taken a primary role in conducting research on how organizations – public and nonprofit – can build a culture that supports and sustains youth-adult partnership. Chapters 4 and 5 of this manual are grounded solidly on Julie's scholarship.

Jane Powers, Director of New York's ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, has been a constant source of expertise and practical insight throughout this project, as well as our earlier collaborations with Cornell University. Her understanding of how to bring together practice with research undergirds this manual.

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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.

ACT for Youth is made possible through the generous support of the New York State Department of Health as part of its effort to promote positive youth development and prevent risky and unhealthy behaviors among adolescents.


ACT for Youth: **www.actforyouth.net**

ACT Youth Network: **www.nysyouth.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

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

Community Impacts



Step Two: Group Discussion

Share your responses from Step One with the group. Then, discuss the following questions.


Did youth and adults in your organization respond differently to the above “Anticipating Your Impacts” activity? Did youth and adults prioritize different impacts? Why?

Chapter Three



Essential Question:

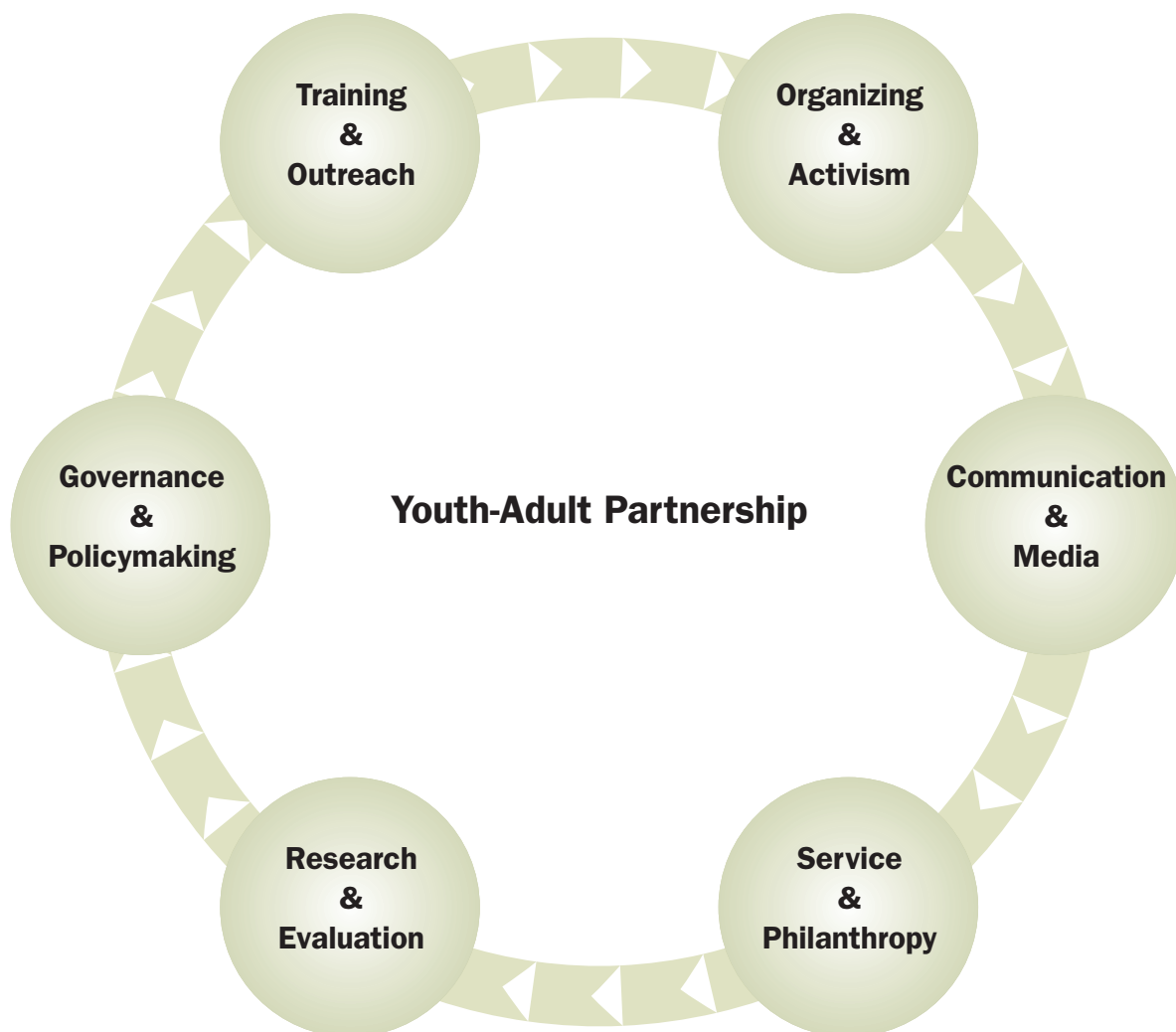
Where should
Y-AP occur within our
organization?



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 | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---|---|--------------|---|
| | | 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



Collective Action

Organizational Strengths

- ➔
- ➔

Organizational Weaknesses

- ➔
- ➔

Share your responses with your colleagues. Where do they agree? Where do they disagree?

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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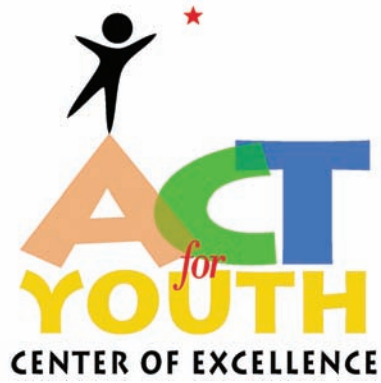
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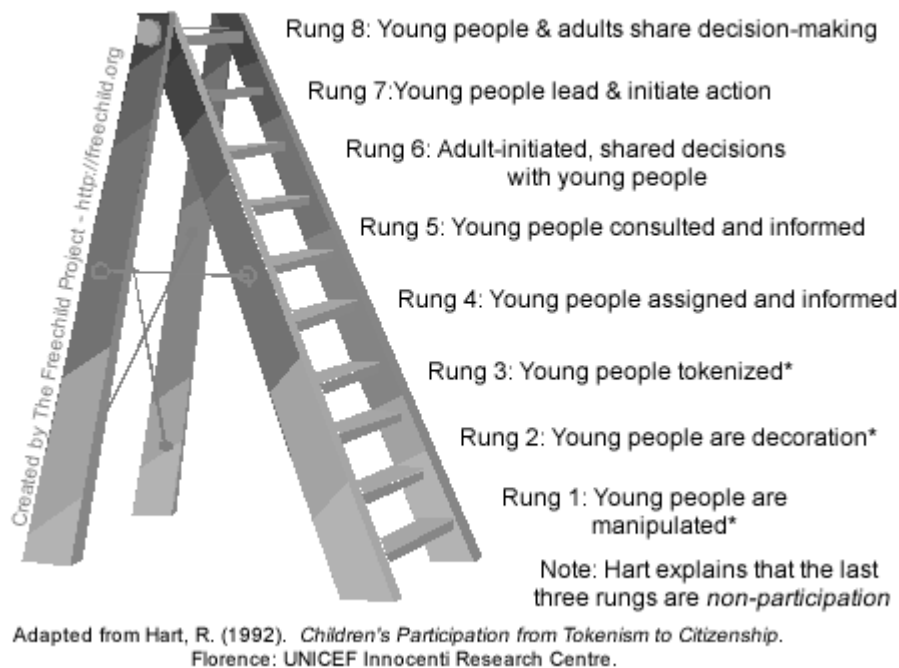
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Ladder of Participation

About the Ladder

Sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book called *Children's Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care* for UNICEF in 1997. This groundbreaking work put the work of young people and adult allies around the world in the context of a global movement for participation, offering needed guidance and criticism of many efforts. The "Ladder of Children's Participation," also called the "Ladder of Youth Participation," is one of many significant tools from the book.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Degrees of Participation

8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth/adult partnerships](#).*

7) Young people-initiated and directed. This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth-led activism](#).*

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people. Occurs when projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [participatory action research](#).*

5) Consulted and informed. Happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth advisory councils](#).*

4) Assigned but informed. This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [community youth boards](#).*

3) Tokenism. When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

2) Decoration. Happens when young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

1) Manipulation. Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

The 7/8 Debate

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation shows young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults as the top form of young people's participation, followed immediately by young people-initiated and directed. This is somewhat controversial an issue for many people working with and around young people. Essentially, the debate is which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful?

Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Most often, this doesn't exclude adults but reduces their role to that of support.

Both arguments have merit; ultimately, it is up to each group to determine which form of decision-making best fits with the groups' needs.

Adapted from [here](#).

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Start A Blank Form

Youth-Adult Partnership **RUBRIC**

A tool for professional development and program evaluation in youth settings
VERSION 1.0

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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | University Outreach and Engagement

NZ *The Neutral Zone*
Where teens lead, create and innovate



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Copies of the Rubric are available from cerc.msu.edu/yaprubric
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| Total Scoring | 12 |

Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

OVERVIEW

Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) is an approach increasingly adopted in youth settings that involves youth and adults acting as partners for a common goal. Similar to the concepts of “youth-driven,” “youth participation” and “youth civic engagement,” it aims to increase **youth voice** and **youth leadership** in affairs that affect them and their communities. Growing research has suggested that such practice can contribute to youth empowerment (Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010), enhance youth’s social-emotional learning (Akiva, Cortina, & Smith, 2014; Larson & Hansen, 2005) and promote effective school and community change (Mitra, 2008; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O’Connor, 2005).

This Rubric is developed based on a partnership between Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative (CERC) at University Outreach and Engagement, Michigan State University, and The Neutral Zone, Ann Arbor’s teen center. It is the primary product of a research study granted by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, the Edmund A. Stanley, Jr. Research Grant with funding support from the Robert Bowne Foundation. It serves the following **purposes**:

1. To formalize the concepts of youth-adult partnership in youth settings
2. To be used as a low-stake peer/self-assessment tool for strengthening youth-adult partnership practices
3. To be used as a formative or summative evaluation tool for assessing the structures and processes of youth-adult partnership in youth settings



According to the article: “**The Psychology and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership**” (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013), Y-AP is defined as “The practice of (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together (b) in a collective (democratic) fashion (c) over a sustained period of time (d) through shared work (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or to affirmatively address a community issue” (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013; pp. 390). Following this framework, the Rubric presents key indicators and behavioral examples suggested from extensive literature review and a series of observations, focus groups and interviews to capture the four critical dimensions of Y-AP highlighted in the article: **(1) authentic decision-making, (2) natural mentors, (3) reciprocity, and (4) community connectedness**. Although most of the observations were conducted in out-of-school time program settings for high-school aged adolescents, the Rubric should be applicable in any youth settings that intend to promote egalitarian relations between youth and adults.

Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Contexts for rating:** Any settings that involve multiple youth and adult(s) working together with extensive dialogue for a common goal. Examples include: youth council meetings at schools or out-of-school time programs, clubs or extracurricular activities (i.e., arts, media production, robotic clubs, literacy programs, etc.).
- 2. Age groups:** This Rubric has been piloted and tested on high-school aged youth. It is designed for adults interacting with older middle-school and high-school aged adolescents.
- 3. Open the file or print:** The Rubric is designed in an interactive PDF format. You can use it on your computer or tablet, or simply print it out as regular rating sheets.
- 4. Read the items and rate:** We recommend that you spend some time getting acquainted with the Rubric before you start the observation and rating. Some people find it helpful to rate through ongoing observation; others like to rate the whole Rubric when the observation is finished. You may choose to pilot it beforehand to get yourself familiarized.
- 5. Rating scale:** The rating scale is 1 (low) - 5 (high); we provide specific descriptions for each score 1, 3, 5. You may find that sometimes the observables are above the lower score but not yet reaching the higher one. If you find yourself in between rating scores (i.e., 3 and 5), it is perfectly fine to rate a behavior as a 4. If you find an item is not applicable, check N/A.
- 6. Note-taking:** You may use the blank space at the end of each indicator to take notes and provide rationale for scoring. We have found it very helpful especially for sharing the results with your peers or for improvement purposes.
- 7. Total score:** A summary of the scores is available at the end of the Rubric. You may review the scores to find strengths and areas for improvement.
- 8. Submit:** This Rubric is a freely available instrument. Your submission of the data will help further improve the instrument. By clicking we'll receive the anonymous data with NO identifying information (i.e., your names, email addresses, etc.). The data will be automatically collected into our database and with a significant number of submissions, we'll be able to statistically test the psychometrics of the instrument and provide the reliability and validity results in the next version for future users. Your participation is completely voluntary; you may choose not to hit and we will have no access to the data you enter. Use the save and print functions to keep a copy for yourself. If you would like to erase all entries to start a new form, go to the cover page and hit "Start A Blank Form".



Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

CONTEXT INFORMATION

DATE:

NUMBER OF YOUTH:

Male Female Undisclosed
 White Black Hispanic Asian Other/Undisclosed

NUMBER OF ADULTS:

Male Female Undisclosed
 White Black Hispanic Asian Other/Undisclosed

AGE RANGE OF THE GROUP:

CONTEXT:

School School-based afterschool program Community-based afterschool program Camp Boy/Girl Scouts

ZIP CODE:

HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP/YOUTH DRIVEN APPROACH?

Not familiar Slightly familiar Somewhat familiar Moderately familiar Extremely familiar



Continued on page 4

Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

CONTEXT INFORMATION

WHAT SETTING ARE YOU OBSERVING?:

Planning meetings

- Youth council or board meeting
- Special event planning
- Other:

Program activities (i.e., school clubs or extracurricular activities):

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/Literacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Media production | <input type="checkbox"/> Risk prevention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Positive youth development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | <input type="checkbox"/> Food and nutrition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Robotic clubs | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign language | | |



DIMENSION 1:

Authentic Decision-making—Youth are involved in meaningful decision-making

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>1.1 Youth's voices are shared and valued.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults dominate group discussions. Youth voice is rarely solicited or valued.</p> <p>During meetings: Adults change topics, interrupt youth or push youth to follow their decisions.</p> <p>During activities: Adults direct and instruct youth throughout the activities.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults frequently solicit youth's inputs, but new perspectives are rarely incorporated or extended upon.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth are invited to share their thoughts but their presence is mostly tokenized.</p> <p>During activities: Youth contribute new ideas for an activity, but new ideas are rarely accepted.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults intentionally support youth voice; new perspectives are as valued as past experiences.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth challenge routines and new possibilities are discussed thoroughly.</p> <p>During activities: Youth contribute new ideas for activities and are encouraged to try them out.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>1.2 Youth participate in authentic decision-making.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth participate in little or no decision-making. Decisions are mainly made by adults.</p> <p>During meetings: When planning a special event, all decisions have been made by adults. Youth are there to do the work.</p> <p>During activities: Adults decide what subject areas youth will learn.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth participate in some decision-making, but not on important items. Youth tend to seek adults' approval for decisions or next steps.</p> <p>During meetings: When planning a special event, youth only get to vote on trivial or smaller Issues (ordering food).</p> <p>During activities: Adults consult with youth on what subject areas they'd like to learn before adults make decisions.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth participate in all decision-making, including both low- or high-stake items.</p> <p>During meetings: When planning a special event, adults collaborate with youth on decisions.</p> <p>During activities: Adults and youth collaborate on ideas or contents for subject learning.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |

Continued on page 6

DIMENSION 1:

Authentic Decision-making—Youth are involved in meaningful decision-making

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>1.3 Youth have key leadership roles or responsibilities.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth have minimal leadership roles and responsibilities. Adults are the leaders of the group.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth are only responsible for small roles and tasks.</p> <p>During activities: Youth learn from adults and do not demonstrate or lead anything.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth have some leadership roles and responsibilities, but they are low-stake.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth act as meeting co-facilitators but only participate in note taking or rarely lead the discussions.</p> <p>During activities: Youth lead the ice-breaker activities, but not high-stake activities.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth take on key leadership roles and responsibilities that further develop their skills and networks.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth act as co-facilitator and lead the discussions.</p> <p>During activities: Youth co-teach with adults and demonstrate the activities.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>1.4 All youth participate fully in the conversation.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>A few youth dominate the conversation and act as representing the whole group. There is little to no intention in trying to balance out unequal power among youth.</p> <p>During meetings: Only a few youth pay attention to the meeting. Facilitators do not try to engage others.</p> <p>During activities: Only a few youth are encouraged to present their work.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>A few youth dominate the conversation. There is some intention in trying to balance out unequal power among youth, but it often fails.</p> <p>During meetings: Only a few youth pay attention to the meeting. Facilitators try to engage others but often fail.</p> <p>During activities: All youth are encouraged to present their work, but only a few want to do so.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth participation is even. Youth may decline the opportunity to speak up based on their own comfort level but their full participation is present.</p> <p>During meetings: Almost all youth pay attention to the meeting.</p> <p>During activities: All youth are encouraged to present their work. The majority of them want to do so.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>1.5 The organization's culture or by-laws supports youth governance.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth have no explicit roles beyond being a participant in the organization.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth can take on certain leadership roles in program activities, but not for the whole organization governance.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth are part of the whole organization governance, as demonstrated by explicit roles they have across the organization.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |



DIMENSION 2:

Natural Mentors—Adults intentionally support relationships with youth to help them develop

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p>2.1 Adults support youth with appropriate boundaries.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do not provide sufficient support for youth. During meetings: Youth express a concern but receive no support from adults. During activities: Adults overlook an individual youth's interest.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults support youth but fail to maintain appropriate boundaries. During meetings: Youth express a concern; adults overreact and take it on a personal level. During activities: Adults spend the whole session discussing an individual youth's interest.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults support youth with appropriate boundaries. During meetings: Youth express a concern; adults check in with youth and provide supportive advice. During activities: Adults acknowledge an individual youth's interest and direct them to valuable resources for advanced learning.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>2.2 Adults are intentional in utilizing tasks to enhance youths' experiences and skills.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth take on activities that have limited opportunities to strengthen or develop new experiences and skills. Adults do not explicitly encourage them to take on more challenging tasks. During meetings: Youth and adults plan to set up interviews with new participants. Youth only volunteer to reserve rooms while adults do the interview. During activities: Youth complete the activity; adults do not help them improve or learn new things.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth take on activities that could be challenging and are provided with opportunities to strengthen or develop new experiences and skills. However, no further training or preparation is provided to prepare them for success. During meetings: Youth express interest in interviewing peers. Adults do not have plans for any training or protocol review ahead of time with youth. During activities: Youth complete the activity; adults provide some basic information that doesn't stimulate growth or discussion.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth take on activities that could be challenging and are provided with opportunities to strengthen or develop new experiences and skills. Adults foresee potential challenges and prepare youth for success. During meetings: Youth express interest in interviewing peers. Adults conduct role-playing activities to prepare youth for the interview. During activities: Youth complete the activity; adults provide essential information that stimulates learning new skills.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |

DIMENSION 2:

Natural Mentors—Adults intentionally support relationships with youth to help them develop

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>2.3 Adults are able to work with youth to maintain an organized, inclusive and collaborative environment for all.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Chaos, disorganization or dysfunction is frequently present in the activity youth participate in.</p> <p>During meetings: Discussions get off-track. Adults are unable to work with youth to get the discussion back on track for a long time.</p> <p>During activities: Adults come disorganized or unprepared for the activity.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Sometimes the activity seems chaotic, disorganized or dysfunctional, but there is some support for collaboration and getting tasks accomplished.</p> <p>During meetings: Discussions get off-track. Sometimes adults are able to get the discussion back on track quickly while other times it varies.</p> <p>During activities: Adults forget to bring some materials for the lesson but are able to improvise.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults support an organized, inclusive and collaborative environment that helps youth work to meet their goals.</p> <p>During meetings: Discussions stay on-track with full participation. Meeting ends on time with goals accomplished.</p> <p>During activities: Youth are in good hands to complete their activity and enjoy the session.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>2.4 Adults are resourceful and intentional in enhancing youths' social capital.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do not mention any resources or networks that could benefit youth.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults mention resources or networks that could be beneficial to youth, but lack tangible actions.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults provide youth with specific contacts or information that could enhance their resources or networks.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>2.5 Adults are active listeners; youth reflect and develop own ideas.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do most of the talking. Youth are constantly interrupted or have limited opportunity to share and develop their ideas.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults are intentional in letting youth talk, but still end up doing most of the talking rather than being an active listener.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults act as active listeners by giving encouragement, repeating back what they're saying, giving wait time for youth to further develop their thoughts. Adults encourage youth to reflect and develop own ideas.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> 1 2 3 4 5 NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |

Continued on page 9

DIMENSION 2:

Natural Mentors—Adults intentionally support relationships with youth to help them develop

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>2.6 Adults help youth think through the complexity of issues and respect whatever conclusions youth reach.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do not help youth think through the complexity of issues, or even if they do, they try to persuade youth what they think would be best for them to do.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults help youth think through the complexity of issues. Sometimes they try to persuade youth what they think would be best for them to do; other times they encourage youth to reach their own conclusions.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults help youth think through the complexity of issues and make clear that they will respect whatever conclusions youth reach.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>2.7 Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future, and identify steps to achieve them.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do not help youth think about goals or opportunities for the future.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future. Yet, discussion is minimal and there are no clear steps to achieve these goals.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future. Discussions include clear tangible steps to achieve these goals.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>2.8 Adults celebrate youths' progress, strengths and successes.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults do not mention any progress, strengths or successes youth have achieved.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults mention some progress, strengths or successes youth have achieved; but youth do not have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults mention some progress, strengths or successes youth have achieved. Youth are encouraged to reflect on their experiences.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |



DIMENSION 3:
Reciprocity—Youth and adults work together as partners

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| <p>3.1 Youth and adults create a mutual agenda.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>The agenda is largely created by adults.</p> <p>During meetings: The meeting agenda is largely created by adults.</p> <p>During activities: Adults prepare what activities are to be delivered to youth.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>The agenda is created by adults with minimal youth input.</p> <p>During meetings: The meeting agenda is largely created by adults, but youth get to review it ahead of time for additions.</p> <p>During activities: Adults prepare what activities are to be delivered to youth, but ask youth if there is anything they want to add on.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>The agenda is co-created by youth and adults.</p> <p>During meetings: Youth and adults co-create meeting agenda ahead of time.</p> <p>During activities: Youth and adults co-prepare for the delivery of activities.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>3.2 Youth and adults exchange ideas as supportive peers.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth and adults rarely draw on each other's ideas.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth and adults sometimes draw on each other's ideas, but they don't genuinely integrate those ideas together.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth and adults routinely seek out one another's opinion and integrate their ideas. Intergroup interactions are natural.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>3.3 Youth and adults work collaboratively as supportive peers.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth and adults tend to work separately from one another.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth and adults occasionally perform tasks that involve collaboration.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth and adults routinely perform tasks that involve collaboration.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>3.4 Youth and adults are co-learning partners.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Adults assume their role is to answer questions for youth or teach youth how to do their tasks.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Adults encourage youth to share some knowledge but still think they know better or it's their role to teach youth how to do their tasks.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Adults assume they don't have all the answers and they're willing to learn from youth or explore new possibilities with youth.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |



DIMENSION 4:
Community Connectedness—Youth are engaged in communities

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>4.1 Youth develop a sense of community through program involvement.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>There is little to no opportunity for youth to develop on-going relationships and connections with each other.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>There are some opportunities for youth to develop relationships with each other, but youth do not have a sense of group membership.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth identify themselves as an active member of the group or the overall program.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>4.2 Youth are active contributors to the community.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Youth participate in activities beneficial to themselves.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Youth participate in activities that benefit themselves and support the program as a whole.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>Youth participate in activities that support themselves, the program as a whole, and the external community.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |
| <p>4.3 Youth gain essential social capital through program involvement.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>The activities provide no opportunities for youth to engage in communities outside of the organization.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>The activities provide youth with minimal opportunities to engage in communities outside of the organization.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>The activities provide youth with meaningful opportunities to engage in communities outside of the organization. Collaboration includes planning or working together so youth can enhance their skills or networks.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> NA </p> <p>NOTES</p> |

Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

SCORING

Please share your data for improvement of the Rubric by either entering the data in the PDF form and clicking the submit button below, faxing the pages to (517) 432-9541 or emailing to wuhengch@msu.edu.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Dimension 1: Authentic Decision-making—Youth are involved in meaningful decision-making | | AVERAGE | |
| 1.1 | Youth's voices are shared and valued. | | |
| 1.2 | Youth participate in authentic decision-making. | | |
| 1.3 | Youth have key leadership roles or responsibilities. | | |
| 1.4 | All youth fully participate in the conversation. | | |
| 1.5 | The organization's culture or by-laws supports youth governance. | | |
| Dimension 2: Natural Mentors—Adults intentionally support relationships with youth to help them develop | | AVERAGE | |
| 2.1 | Adults support youth with appropriate boundaries. | | |
| 2.2 | Adults are intentional in utilizing tasks to enhance youths' experiences and skills. | | |
| 2.3 | Adults are able to work with youth to maintain an organized, inclusive and collaborative environment for all. | | |
| 2.4 | Adults are resourceful and intentional in enhancing youth's social capital. | | |
| 2.5 | Adults are active listeners; youth reflect and develop own ideas. | | |
| 2.6 | Adults help youth think through the complexity of issues and respect whatever conclusions they reach. | | |
| 2.7 | Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future, and identify steps to achieve them. | | |
| 2.8 | Adults celebrate youths' progress, strength or success. | | |
| Dimension 3: Reciprocity—Youth and adults work together as partners | | AVERAGE | |
| 3.1 | Youth and adults create mutual agenda. | | |
| 3.2 | Youth and adults exchange ideas as supportive peers. | | |
| 3.3 | Youth and adults work collaboratively as supportive peers. | | |
| 3.4 | Youth and adults are co-learning partners. | | |
| Dimension 4: Community Connectedness—Youth are engaged in communities | | AVERAGE | |
| 4.1 | Youth develop a sense of community through program involvement. | | |
| 4.2 | Youth are active contributors to the community. | | |
| 4.3 | Youth gain essential social capital through program involvement. | | |
| Do you have any feedback on the rubric? | | TOTAL The average of four dimension scores/highest score possible (5 x 100%) | % |

Submit



Executive Summary

Youth-Adult Partnerships in Community Decision Making: What Does It Take to Engage Adults in the Practice?

Shepherd Zeldin
Julie Petrokubi
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Carole MacNeil
University of California-Davis

May 2007

Youth participation—the direct involvement of youth in shaping the policies, planning, and implementation of their programs, organizations, and communities—is perhaps the most innovative practice that has recently emerged from the fields of positive youth development and community change.

Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) in decision making is the cornerstone of authentic youth participation. More than 30 years ago, the National Commission on Resources of Youth defined the criteria for quality partnership. Y-AP exists where (a) there is mutuality in teaching and learning among youth and adults; (b) each age group sees itself as a resource for the other; and (c) each age group offers what it uniquely can provide. Over the past decade, Y-AP in decision-making has increasingly been conceptualized as a fundamental element of quality in all of the places where youth and adults work together for a common purpose including governance, policy making, program planning, philanthropy, activism, communication, media, research and training.

Through the 4-H Youth in Governance Initiative, National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA, along with its non-profit private sector partner, National 4-H Council, is promoting Y-AP as a core practice for 4-H's nationwide system. 4-H is seeking to provide the field with models, resources and research-based information to help policy makers and practitioners “infuse” youth into governance of 4-H Youth Development, county legislative boards, and community coalitions for youth.

The present research, summarized in this executive summary, is part of this nationwide effort. The research,



conducted in five states and involving more than 60 interviews with staff, community leaders, and youth, has three purposes:

1. Review theory and empirical research on the benefits and outcomes of Y-AP.
2. Identify implementation challenges to Y-AP.
3. Identify goals and strategies used by staff that maximize the likelihood of Y-AP being successfully integrated into community governance and organizational decision making.

The full report will be available at www.fourhcouncil.edu/YouthInGovernanceProgram.aspx in June 2007.



prior experience, skill or perhaps the motivation to

Review of Theory and Research

Why engage youth and adults as partners in decision-making? The philosophical rationale has been put forth for many years: Y-AP, when implemented in a quality manner, ensures youth representation and voice on key issues, helps build civil society, and contributes to organizational development. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that youth participation allows children to better protect themselves, strengthens their commitment to democracy, and leads to better policy decisions.

Recent developmental theory and research is confirmatory. Youth and community scholars consistently conclude that when youth are active participants in influential settings of decision making, they can become significant resources for themselves and for others. Research indicates that youth can take the greatest advantage of these opportunities when they form emotional and instrumental relationships with youth workers, teachers, and community leaders over a sustained period of time. An emerging body of research indicates that youth participation has positive influences on the culture, structure, and programming of youth organizations and schools.

It is fairly easy to make a strong case for Y-AP in decision making. Quality implementation is another matter, however. Most adults simply do not have the

change their traditional ways of working with youth. Unfortunately, scant theory and research is available to guide policy makers and practitioners on how to integrate innovative youth development practices—such as Y-AP in decision making—into established programs, organizations, and governance bodies. To fill that gap, the present research goes into the field to document and analyze the voices and strategies of those practitioners who are actively seeking to infuse youth-adult partnerships into community decision making.

Challenges to Implementing Youth-Adult Partnerships

Y-AP in decision making is an innovative idea that has yet to enter mainstream thought or practice in the United States. 4-H staff recognize that they are swimming against the cultural tide, with relatively little institutional or normative support. During the interviews and case studies, staff most frequently spoke to three challenges:

4-H's traditions are a foremost challenge. Traditions offer valuable stability and powerful community support for 4-H programming. At the same time, traditions are deeply rooted with implicit beliefs about how things should be done, and thus can significantly impede the adoption of new or innovative practices, such as Y-AP in decision making.

This context challenges staff to broaden their traditional roles and responsibilities. Quite often, they must become “cheerleaders” and “advocates” for Y-AP. Staff must convince community leaders and volunteers to

participate in new types of training. They have to create new networks of community support.

The third challenge is time, and time is a scarce commodity. For staff, most of whom have been burdened with budgetary cut-backs over the past decade, finding the time to confront existing traditions and to take on new roles and responsibilities becomes a tremendous obstacle.

Strategies for Engaging Adults in Youth-Adult Partnerships

Some 4-H staff are impressively strategic in infusing Y-AP into 4-H governance, county boards, and community coalitions. By documenting the common strategies employed by these staff, this research has been able to identify a framework of “promising practices.” The framework is “living” in that it is not meant to be a step-by-step progression of activities. Rather, it describes the overarching management goals and strategies that guide staff as they continually assess local conditions and refine their course of action to suit the changing context of each Y-AP project.

The most successful staff relentlessly focuses their time and energy on three fundamental management goals:

Staff maintain adult attention on the purpose and expected outcomes of Y-AP. That is, staff constantly “plant seeds” to show how Y-AP meets organizational and community priorities. They actively seek out the support of influential champions and the involvement of professional networks.



Staff help adult stakeholders translate the vision of Y-AP into usable practices. In the words of staff, they demonstrate to others how to “walk the talk” of Y-AP. Staff provide modeling, training and

consultation. They coach adults through interactions with youth, and then facilitate reflection on issues of quality.

Staff build a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders. They ensure that “Y-AP is how we do business.” Toward this end, the most successful staff establish clear responsibilities and expectations for adult and youth stakeholders. They work to ensure that organizational policies, budgets and collective stories are properly aligned to support the goals of Y-AP.



Creating Conditions for Youth-Adult Partnership

Because public systems tend to mirror the more traditional values of a given society, innovative change in public systems is often considered an oxymoron. But change can, and does, happen. Five recommendations arise from this research:

Staff need to have confidence. Y-AP in decision making challenges established systems and accepted ways of doing things. The most successful staff have the confidence to act within this context of ambiguity and risk. They use this confidence to reconcile diverse agendas and push colleagues out of their comfort zones, when necessary.

Staff need to be strategic in their use of time. The most successful staff are highly focused in how they disseminate and promote Y-AP. As noted above, their efforts are centered around maintaining adult attention on the purpose and desired outcomes of Y-AP, translating the relatively abstract idea of Y-AP into practice, and building shared ownership and structure for Y-AP.

Staff need to balance structures and relationships. The foundation for good results in any realm of society is a structure that encourages and sustains them. The most successful staff are strong infrastructure builders. They



seek to create both institutional structures and interpersonal networks to support Y-AP.

Staff need to plan for transitions. Y-AP is highly fluid.

Youth “age out” and adults “rotate off” committees. Local politicians and school superintendents retire. The most successful staff plan for transition, viewing it as an opportunity to ensure the sustainability of Y-AP in decision making. They create ongoing recruitment mechanisms, ensure clarity in role and responsibility, and institutionalize opportunities for collective reflection and planning.

Staff need leadership from the state. This aspect of the research is continuing. At present, our preliminary conclusion is that local staff can profit most greatly from two types of assistance. First, states must explicitly legitimize Y-AP as a priority for local organizations and programs. Second, staff require assistance in community capacity building.

Future Directions

Y-AP in decision making is not only an innovative practice, it is also one of the most difficult to implement with quality. For this reason, we believe that the lessons learned from 4-H staff in this study are transferable to other “less complex” or curriculum-based program strategies. Many innovative practices—mentoring, leadership training, organizing, coaching, community building—are grounded in principles and processes that are open to multiple interpretation and implementation choices. The present findings, therefore, could be used to inform other practitioners of innovative practice create a common purpose with others, translate good ideas into day to day practice, and build shared ownership among diverse stakeholders.

The present findings must be empirically tested by scholars and field tested by practitioners, of course. With the accumulation of such data, the field will be in a far stronger position to disseminate and provide the adoption of Y-AP in decisions making, as well as other evidence-based practices in the fields of youth development and community change.

References and Resources

Interested in knowing more? The following resources provide a wealth of information and links:

www.fourhcouncil.edu/YouthinGovernanceProgram.aspx

Linda Camino, Carrie Mook, Cailin O’Connor & Shepherd Zeldin (2005). Youth and adult leaders for program excellence: A practical guide for program assessment and action planning. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University. (www.actforyouth.net)

Dean Fixsen, Sandra Naom, & Karen Blase (2005). Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature (FMHI publication #231). Tampa: University of South Florida. (<http://nirn.fmhi.usf.edu>)

Shepherd Zeldin, Reed Larson, and Linda Camino (2005). Youth-adult relationships in community programs: Diverse perspectives on good practices. *Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 33. (Special Issue).

Shepherd Zeldin, Julie Petrokubi, and Carole MacNeil (in press). Youth-adult partnerships in decision making: Disseminating and implementing an innovative idea into established organizations and communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

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Youth-Adult Partnerships in Public Action:

Principles, Organizational Culture & Outcomes

*Shepherd Zeldin, Julie Petrokubi, Linda Camino
University of Wisconsin – Madison*

October 2008

**the
forum**
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

 THE UNIVERSITY
of
WISCONSIN
MADISON
CENTER FOR NONPROFITS

About the Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21[®] – ready for college, work and life. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. A trusted resource for policy makers, advocates, researchers and practitioners, the Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, connections and tools they need to create greater opportunities and outcomes for young people.

The Forum was founded in 1998 by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, two of the country’s top leaders on youth issues and youth policy. The Forum’s 25-person staff is headquartered in Washington, D.C. in the historic Cady-Lee House with a satellite office in Michigan and staff in Missouri, Oregon and Virginia.

About the Authors

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Youth-Adult Partnerships in Public Action:

Principles, Organizational Culture & Outcomes

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October 2008

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Preface

In 2002, the Forum for Youth Investment merged with Community IMPACT! USA, a move that grounded the Forum's national perspective and linked us directly to the work of grassroots organizations involved in youth leadership and community development. Through that experience we learned a great deal about engaging youth in community change. What we learned both affirmed theoretical work we have done about these ideas in the past and pushed our thinking in important new ways. In particular, we had an opportunity to learn a lot more about how organizations actually do this work – how they get, essentially, from *ideas* about youth engagement and community change to *impact*.

In July 2007, we published *Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change* in an effort to summarize what we learned through our relationship with two local organizations that were part of the Community IMPACT! USA network – Austin Voices for Educational Change and Oasis Community IMPACT in Nashville. The principles offer a framework to help any organization that wants to meaningfully engage youth get started. The principles cluster into four key areas we think must be addressed in order for youth engagement efforts or youth-adult partnerships to result in real change at the individual and community levels: *opportunity* (chance for young people to use skills, act on passions and generate change); *motivation* (understanding, awareness and commitment); *capacity* (knowledge, leadership and action skills); and the *foundation* or infrastructure necessary to support this work.

Identifying these core principles was a useful exercise but it did not fully satisfy our desire to understand and describe the specific practices that occur inside of these organizations and what outcomes they are able to generate as a result. To take that next step we partnered with Shepherd Zeldin, Julie Petrokubi and Linda Camino – a team of experienced qualitative researchers with specific expertise in youth-adult partnership and community change.

Their findings and the case studies described in this report underscore the critical role that community-based organizations can play both in developing young people's leadership abilities and driving positive community change. Specifically, the authors push beyond principles, identifying effective organizational and management practices that can help any organization committed to meaningful youth engagement advance their efforts in concrete ways. Additionally, the outcomes they identify present a useful impact framework for much-needed future program evaluation and research efforts. Documenting the outcomes that organizations like those featured in this report can achieve – with the young people who participate and the adults, institutions and communities they work with – is critical to ensuring further investment and innovation.

Young people are disproportionately involved in and affected by the problems that beset communities and states. Far too many young people are not doing well because communities are not doing well by them. This is cause for concern – and for engagement. Young people are not only at the center of many problems, they are the source of many solutions. Without direct youth and family input into community and state efforts to improve youth services and policies, efforts can miss the mark. This is why youth and family engagement is a core strategy in the Forum's Ready by 21[®] approach, now being used in communities and states across the country to drive long-term change.

Nicole Yohalem
Forum for Youth Investment

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the staff and youth of Austin Voices for Education and Youth and Oasis Community IMPACT for being generous with your time and insights as we worked with you on this project.

Thanks to the Surdna Foundation, the Robert Bowne Foundation and Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development for their support of this work.

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Executive Summary

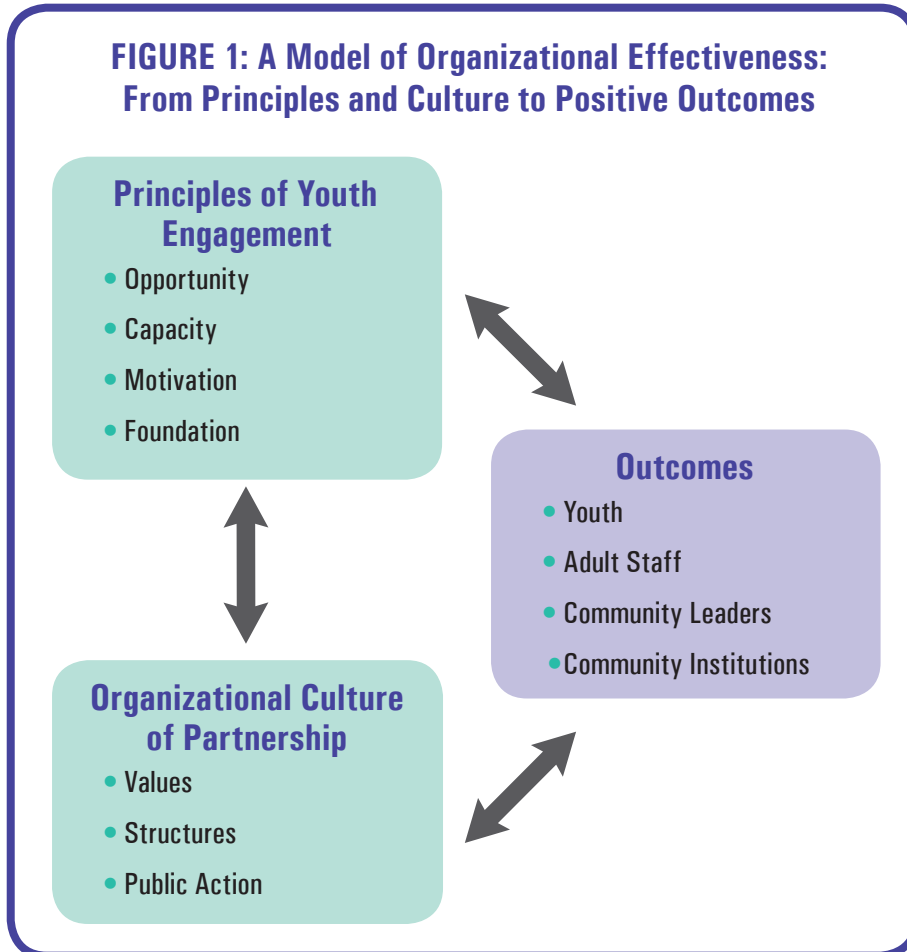
When young people are afforded opportunities to make a real difference in their communities, youth benefit as do local residents and community institutions. Despite the potential of these strategies and the range of labels used to describe them (youth action, youth engagement, community service, service-learning and youth organizing or youth-adult partnerships), surprisingly few organizations exist for the explicit purpose of catalyzing meaningful youth engagement in community change. The practices and impact of those organizations that do exist are not well understood or documented.

This study explores key principles of youth engagement from the vantage point of youth and adults involved in community organizing and advocacy. It then explores how organizations create

a culture of partnership powerful enough to sustain those principles over time and the range of positive outcomes that result. The findings are relevant for any entity that is interested in involving young people in community change including youth councils, youth-serving agencies, advocacy organizations, community development organizations or community coalitions.

The research focuses on two organizations that are grounded in traditions of youth development, community organizing and system change: Oasis Community IMPACT (OCI), located in Nashville, Tennessee and Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY) in Austin, Texas. Methods included document review; site visits; and interviews with founders, board members, staff and youth.

FIGURE 1: A Model of Organizational Effectiveness: From Principles and Culture to Positive Outcomes



In conducting the research, we found close associations between principles of youth engagement, organizational culture and a broad range of outcomes. These associations, outlined below, are highlighted in Figure 1.

Translating Principles of Youth Engagement into Practice

Pittman, Martin and colleagues (2007) commingled research and field experience to identify core principles of effective youth engagement:

- **Opportunity:** Youth need authentic access to change-makers, as well as connections to the broader youth community.
- **Capacity:** Youth need the training, tools and teams to be prepared to engage in change efforts.
- **Motivation:** Youth need the time to learn about community issues and the chance to decide what issues they want to address.
- **Foundation:** Youth need to be connected to a solid organization or group that is able to foster membership, continuity and a supportive work environment.

These principles were central to the everyday operation of both organizations included in this study. OCI and AVEY translate these principles of youth engagement into practice in several ways. Strategies include:

- Adult staff work hard to build relationships and networks and arrange for opportunities for youth to gain access to and interact with public officials and community leaders. Youth regularly accompany adult staff to formal and informal meetings. While adult staff may arrange for meetings to take place, youth often lead presentations and interactions.
- Adult staff create structures that allow youth to build their own capacity with multiple pathways for participation, learning, mentoring

and employment. Youth have time and resources to learn about the issues, develop research, communications and project management skills.

- Both organizations provide youth with a comfortable and motivational work environment, one where youth have a large say over what happens, when and how. Youth speak clearly about the sense of respect and membership in these settings. At the same time, there are high expectations.

Building an Organizational Culture of Partnership

Both organizations were creating a culture which allowed youth and adults to work effectively within the organization. This culture of partnership – consisting of values, structure and public action – oriented the choices and behaviors of the youth and adults and over time, this culture is what allowed the organizations to reach outside their own walls to have a positive impact on the larger community. The key components of a culture of organizational partnership include:

Partnership Values

- Organizational leaders, by word and deed, establish youth-adult partnership 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 and problem solving.
- Organizational goals and actions are clearly rooted in the “lived experience” of youth.
- Adult staff people validate youth culture and encourage creative forms of self-expression.
- Programs foster collaboration rather than competition; a sense that “it’s not all about me.”

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 partnership.
- Adults and youth each have the opportunity to reflect and learn with their same-age peers.

Public Action

- The action addresses issues that are of high priority to the larger community 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 efforts.
- The action puts youth in key communication roles to ensure that the youth perspective reaches community leaders and constituent groups.
- The work occurs over time, it is not episodic.
- The work visibly models youth-adult partnership to the larger community.
- Organizations continue to maintain a public role in monitoring implementation even after initial “wins” are secured in order to promote on-going accountability.

The Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnership in Public Action

The culture of partnership within AVEY and OCI – the adoption of partnership values, the creation of partnership structures and the enactment of public action – supports the principles of youth engagement and allows the organization to have broad impacts at multiple levels.

This study indicates that the principles of youth engagement, when supported by an organizational culture of youth-adult partnership, promote positive developmental outcomes among youth and staff. Over time, community institutions become more responsive to youth participation and to the agendas advanced by the organizations and the youth-adult partnerships. Specific outcomes at each level include:

Impacts on Youth Development

- **Safety & Belonging:** Youth feel accepted, supported and respected within the organization. They experience a strong sense of collective identity and pride in organization membership.
- **Efficacy & Empowerment:** Youth increase confidence in their ability to effect change within their settings, both as individuals and as members of a group. They come to “own” their own expertise and accomplishments as community leaders.
- **Sociopolitical Awareness & Civic Competence:** Youth learn how critically analyze the relationship between their own lived experience and larger social, economic and political structures. Youth also gain the knowledge (understanding of political systems and processes), attitudes (tolerance) and skills (public speaking, group facilitation, deliberation) they need to participate as civic actors.
- **Community Connections:** Youth gain a deeper understanding of their community and a closer connection with their peers. Adults connect youth with professional networks and opportunities.

Impacts on Adult Staff Development

- ***Confidence & Competence:*** Adults develop the 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.

Impacts on Community Leaders

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

Impacts on Institutions

- ***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 public decision making bodies (eg., school boards, local government) reflect the critical interests, concerns and priorities of young people. Youth raise new, complex issues that require a more nuanced response.
- ***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.

When youth engagement principles become an organizational priority, good things happen. The principles help organizations create a culture of youth-adult partnership. The principles and culture work in tandem to have positive impacts on participating youth, staff, community leaders and public institutions.

This work is not easy. This study and previous research underscore the importance of focused organizational leadership as a primary ingredient to organizational transformation and positive impact. Three management strategies that stand out include: maintaining attention on the purpose and expected outcomes of youth engagement, actively working to translate a vision of youth engagement into quality practice and continually seeking to build a sense of shared ownership for the priority on youth engagement.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a burst of reports highlighting the imperative to integrate the practices of youth engagement and community development. Tolman and Pittman (2001), for example, assert that youth and community development may be understood as two sides of the same coin. Zeldin and colleagues (2000) emphasize the reciprocal influences that young people and communities have on each other. When youth are afforded an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of others, the engaged youth benefit as do local residents and community institutions. Increasingly, a similar argument is being applied to school communities. When young people are engaged in educational change endeavors, youth become more motivated to engage in school. At the same time, schools become more motivated and better able to create more challenging and supportive environments for learning (Joselowsky, 2007).

Despite the potential of this practice, there are surprisingly few organizations with the purpose of catalyzing meaningful youth engagement in community change. One reason is that policy and program leaders lack practical frameworks to guide the design and implementation of youth engagement. To help address this gap, Pittman, Martin and colleagues (2007) commingled research and field experience to identify core principles of effective youth engagement. These authors then applied these principles to identify action steps for state and municipal youth councils (Martin, Pittman and colleagues). They stress, however, that the principles are appropriate for any group that is seeking to actively involve young people in organizational change. The principles are as follows:

- **Opportunity:** Youth need authentic access to change-makers, as well as connections to the broader youth community.
- **Capacity:** Youth need the training, tools and teams to be prepared to engage in change efforts.
- **Motivation:** Youth need the time to learn about

community issues and the chance to decide what issues they want to address.

- **Foundation:** Youth need to be connected to a solid organization or group that is able to foster membership, continuity and a supportive work environment.

Research Questions

The present study builds on the above body of research. First, we consider the principles of youth engagement from the vantage point of youth and adults involved in community organizing and advocacy. Second, we explore questions of organizational culture and community outcomes. Specifically, we address three fundamental questions for which there is little available research in the field:

- How do the principles of youth engagement translate into organizational practice within the context of community organizing and advocacy?
- How do organizations create a culture of partnership, a culture that is powerful enough to sustain the principles of effective youth engagement over the long term?
- What is the range of positive outcomes that result when organizations build an organizational culture of youth-adult partnership in public action?

In this research, we intentionally use the phrase “youth-adult partnership in public action.” Others have used terms such as youth organizing, youth action, youth engagement or youth leadership to refer to similar or related practices. *We chose the phrase “youth-adult partnership in public action” because it reminds us that engagement by both youth and adults is critical to the health of our communities and institutions.* Community change is not about youth leading the charge, nor is it about adults having the necessary life experience. Community change is hard enough. To expect any group – youth or adults – to do it alone makes little sense. The focus

on “partnership,” we believe, conveys this sensibility (Zeldin, Larson and Camino 2005).

We also intentionally use the phrase “public action.” The emphasis on the word “public” highlights that effective youth-adult partnerships are *for the larger community*. Public action is collective. At the same time, the action is public in that the action *is known by or visible to the community*. We emphasize the word “action” because it conveys energy and influence. Further, action is the word typically used by youth and adults to describe their work.

Methodology

This study focuses on two organizations that are grounded in traditions of youth development, community organizing and system change: Oasis Community IMPACT (OCI), located in Nashville, Tennessee; and Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY), located in Austin, Texas. Three criteria guided the selection of OCI and AVEY for study:

- ***The organizations are seeking to translate the principles of youth engagement into effective practice.*** Each organization has been experimenting with different strategies over the past three years. Through these efforts, they have reached a point of maturity and quality in practice.
- ***Youth-adult partnership is a core priority that focuses the management and operations of both organizations.*** Youth take on visible leadership positions within OCI and AVEY, not symbolic roles. Adult staff coach the youth, in addition to taking on active leadership roles themselves as appropriate.
- ***OCI and AVEY are explicitly in the business of public action.*** Through collective and highly visible action, the organizations are seeking to influence school and community policies and programming.

In brief, OCI and AVEY represent exemplary organizations that are grappling with the research questions presented above. Because the organizations worked hard over a period of years to adopt principles of youth engagement and to create a culture of partnership, they should be well positioned to have broad impacts on youth and community. The purpose of this study is to determine the validity of this hypothesis.

OCI and AVEY are clearly innovators in youth-adult partnership. At the same time, OCI and AVEY are normative organizations. Like other organizations across the country, they are actively adopting youth-adult partnership as a core principle in ways that make sense for their own mission and

their own communities. In this way, the lessons learned from OCI and AVEY are highly relevant to all other organizations – community coalitions and partnerships, public agencies, community development initiatives – that are seeking to promote youth engagement in community change.

Methods

This study gathered four types of data on these organizations:

- In order to understand the evolution of organizational mission and programming, the research team analyzed organizational documents (reports, grants, brochures) as well as press coverage of AVEY and OCI. Key stakeholders – founders, board members and Forum staff involved in providing technical assistance – were interviewed.
- To explore the research questions, interviews and focus groups were conducted with 22 “youth mobilizers” and 3 young adult staff who were also former youth mobilizers. Most participants were youth of color from families with limited economic means. Many had histories of disengagement from school.
- To gain an adult perspective on the research questions, interviews were conducted with 12 staff and board members and 8 community leaders who had partnered with or who were familiar with the work of the two organizations.
- The interviews were complemented by observations in community meetings, public events and educational activities.

All interviews were transcribed and field notes were compiled from the observations.

Model and Analysis Strategy

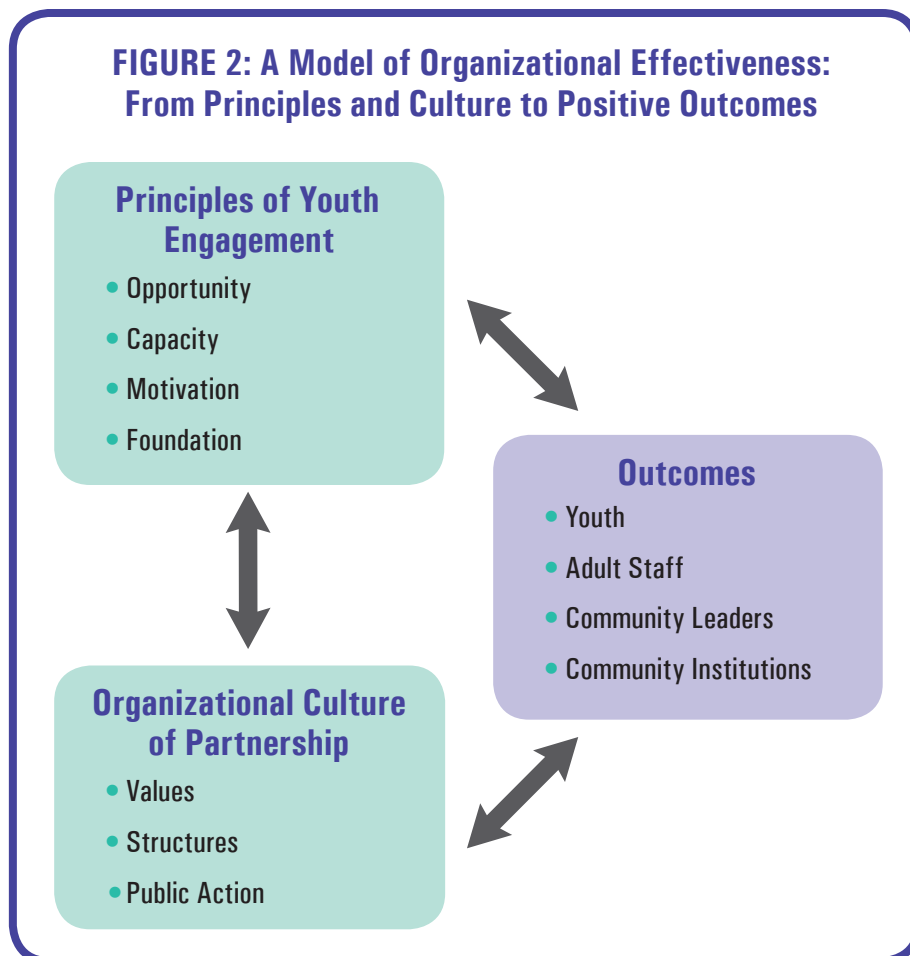
Our model of organizational effectiveness has three parts (see Figure 1). The first is the extent to which an organization is able to translate principles into real practices. The second part is the extent

to which an organization can create a culture that sustains the principles and the practices. And, finally, effectiveness is the extent to which an organization produces positive outcomes. In this study, we assessed all three parts of the model as it relates to youth engagement (See Figure 2).

A bit of clarification on Figure 2 is necessary. The arrows connecting the three parts of the model go both ways. This bi-directionality underscores the fact that principles, culture and outcomes are highly related. As an organization starts to produce positive outcomes, for example, these successes often reinforce the organizational culture. Similarly, as the organizational culture is strengthened, it serves to reinforce the principles of youth engagement.

But the important point is this: Principles of youth engagement, an organizational culture of youth-adult partnership and positive outcomes are all critical to organizational effectiveness. Without all three parts, quality practice is not sustainable.

The first focus of the analysis was to examine the extent to which the principles of youth engagement – opportunity, capacity, motivation and foundation – existed within OCI and AVEY. To do so, case studies were created for each organization. The next step in the analysis was to explore the strategies through which the organizations created a culture of partnership. The data were analyzed to identify the elements of organizational culture – values, structures, public action – that allowed OCI and



AVEY to integrate youth engagement throughout their organization and community work. The third step was to explore and identify positive outcomes – youth, adult leaders and community institutions – that could be attributed to the organizations' use of youth-adult partnership in public action.

For each of the three steps of the analysis, the research team completed multiple phases of coding, with each phase focused on identifying primary categories and themes existing within the data. At the completion of each phase, the research team prepared and discussed interpretive memos. We consistently revisited our organizational observations to connect them with the interview and focus group data. Subsequently, informant checks were used as an additional validation method. A draft version of the report was sent to the participating organizations. Staff were asked to identify errors of fact and questions of interpretation.

Translating Principles of Youth Engagement into Practice

Organizational case studies were conducted to explore how OCI and AVEY translated principles of effective youth engagement into organizational practice. These case studies confirmed that the core principles – opportunity, capacity, motivation and foundation – were central to the everyday operation of both organizations. Organizational culture and processes emphasized youth-adult partnership. There was a clear vision within OCI and AVEY, evident in their organizational planning and strategy, that youth and adults both bring necessary resources to the table.

Key findings from the case studies are presented below. Appendices A and B provide more detailed case study reports of OCI and AVEY. Additional information, including copies of the organizations' reports and newsletters, can be found for Austin Voices at www.austinvoices.org and for Oasis Community IMPACT at www.oasiscenter.org.

Oasis Community IMPACT

The mission of OCI is to “mobilize neighborhoods – youth, families, businesses and organizations – to increase educational and economic opportunities for young people.” Toward this end, high-school aged “youth mobilizers” work in partnership with OCI staff to conduct and disseminate action-oriented research. Recent research focused on exposing the challenges that East Nashville youth face in transitioning into higher education and on confronting predatory lending practices in low-income communities. The findings, documented in reports and other outreach materials, are then used as a platform for vigorous outreach and education directed at community and school leaders. Youth are coached by adult staff to give testimony in public hearings, presentations to public decision-making bodies and workshops to community residents.

OCI translates the principles of youth engagement into practice in several ways. Key strategies include:

- OCI adult staff work hard to arrange opportunities through which youth mobilizers can gain access to public officials and community leaders in Nashville. While adult staff may arrange the meetings and the opportunities for youth to “speak truth to power,” the youth mobilizers are the ones who make the presentations. OCI adult staff intentionally play a secondary role in such interactions.
- OCI youth are effective, in large part, because adult staff create structures that allow youth to build their own capacity. Specifically, staff provide youth with ample time to learn about the issues, offer assistance in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and serve as role models and formal trainers who teach the mobilizers how to communicate findings and policy recommendations.
- The mobilizers thrive because OCI provides them with a solid foundation and motivational work environment, one where youth have a large say over what happens, when and how. The environment – a well equipped office, housed within a high school, with lots of space for interaction and dialogue – is perceived by youth as “their space”. To promote continuity, the youth mobilizers take the lead in recruiting and hiring the young people who will be their colleagues.

Austin Voices for Education and Youth

The mission of AVEY is to “mobilize the community to strengthen schools and expand opportunities for Austin’s youth.” Toward this end, AVEY takes a multilevel approach to systems change. Within high schools, adult staff empower students to take on issues of concern to their home campus. At the district level, a group of “youth mobilizers” are trained and supported by staff as they organize city-wide rallies, public hearings and discussion forums. The most experienced youth (“youth consultants”) work directly with the public school system, partner organizations and city-wide youth coalitions. AVEY staff and youth inform district officials through

governance and advisory bodies. Additionally, youth and adult partners co-facilitate community conversations to help bring the concerns of residents to public officials.

AVEY translates the principles of youth engagement into practice in several ways. Key strategies include:

- AVEY adult staff work hard to create strong relationships and networks that result in youth having opportunities and access to district leaders in the public schools. Youth accompany AVEY adult staff as full partners to formal and informal meetings at the district office. Within high schools, AVEY staff actively support youth mobilizers as they build coalitions of youth around campus issues.
- To build youth capacity and motivation, there are multiple pathways for participation. A core group of youth mobilizers learn together in a civics class and after-school program operated by AVEY out of an alternative high school. In these settings, youth learn about the history and methods of civic engagement, while developing the skills to participate. Once youth are prepared, they may be hired by AVEY to help organize events such as rallies, public hearings and outreach campaigns. Youth may then advance to a consultant level, where they work closely with AVEY staff on specific projects such as program development and fundraising.
- Youth feel quite comfortable in their civics class and in the AVEY office. They consider both settings to be “their place,” a solid foundation from which to do their work. Youth speak clearly about the sense of respect and membership in these settings. At the same time, there are high expectations. The mobilizers and consultants have written job descriptions that orient their work.

Building an Organizational Culture of Partnership

The idea that youth may make positive and significant contributions to organizations and communities remains an innovative idea in the United States. Research indicates that very few adults have worked closely with youth, in a sustained fashion, on issues of common concern. Indeed, youth are more often considered part of the problem than part of the solution when it comes to community change. This stereotype is especially put on youth from low income neighborhoods and on youth and youth of color. There exist few societal norms or institutions to support the creation of intergenerational partnerships (Zeldin, Camino and Calvert, 2003; Kirby, Lanyon and colleagues, 2003; Ginwright, 2006).

Given this societal context, it is impressive that AVEY and OCI have been able to translate the principles of youth engagement into practice. As noted above and in the case studies (see Appendices), the organizations have created legitimate opportunities and access for youth to have a real impact on community and school policy. Youth participate in an array of trainings and are mentored by adults and peers as they build their capacity and motivation to do the work. The organizations provide a solid foundation – a home base – from which youth and their adult partners may launch their initiatives.

The next focus of the research was to explore sustainability. Specifically, what are these organizations doing that is powerful enough to translate and implement the principles of effective youth engagement over the long term? As the research team analyzed the data, the answer became clear. Most succinctly, the organizations were creating a culture which allowed youth and adults to work effectively within the organization. This culture of partnership – consisting of values, structure and public action – oriented the choices and behaviors of the youth and adults. And, over time, this culture is what allowed the organizations to reach outside their own walls to have a positive impact on the larger community.

The key strategies used by AVEY and OCI to create this culture are highlighted below and in Figure 3.

Partnership Values

OCI and AVEY have made great strides in creating a core set of partnership values. Specifically, there exists a shared belief that the quality of organizational decision making and action is enhanced when youth and adults are fully involved in the process. This belief is salient throughout both organizations. The voices of youth and adults are reflected in all decisions. 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, personal and organizational.

This element of culture is sparked by the organizational leaders. By word and deed, they establish youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) in public action as a core organizational priority, not a side project. The data converges on this point. In reviewing organizational policies, in listening to the executive directors describe their role, in listening to staff and youth describe the executive directors and in observing the executive directors in action, it is clear that the executive directors both “talk the talk” and “walk the talk.”

Consequently, the organization creates decision making forums – formal and informal – where staff and youth feel safe to address issues of trust, power and authority. They don’t shy away from controversial issues. Within these forums, staff and youth strive to create relationships characterized by mutuality in teaching and learning. Youth and adults see themselves as resources for each other. Choice and accountability are core values within a culture of partnership. Individuals have the opportunity to engage in ways consistent with their own interest and skill. At the same time, they are expected to finish, in a quality way, what they have set out to do. When challenges arise, such as in the case of a young adult who had never written a funding proposal before, it is the individual’s responsibility to seek assistance and the organization’s responsibility to provide it.

FIGURE 3: Key Strategies: Building a Culture of Youth-Adult Partnership

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 and problem solving.
- Organizational goals and actions are clearly rooted in the “lived experience” of youth.
- Adult staff people validate youth culture and encourage creative forms of self-expression.
- Programs foster collaboration rather than competition; a sense that “it’s not all about me.”

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.

Public Action

- The action addresses issues that are of high priority to the larger community 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 efforts.
- The action puts youth in key communication roles to ensure that the youth perspective reaches community leaders and constituent groups.
- The work occurs over time, it is not episodic.
- The work visibly models youth-adult partnerships to the larger community.
- Organizations continue to maintain a public role in monitoring implementation even after initial “wins” are secured in order to promote on-going accountability.

Partnership Structures

AVEY and OCI established *partnership structures* – roles, processes and policies – that sustain a culture of partnership. Fundamental is clarity in the roles of youth and adults, as established by policy and position descriptions. Such clarity provides the participants with the structure and boundaries that allow them to manage their limited time and make the best use of resources. The youth especially appreciate this structure. Many of them have never before had their roles and responsibilities articulated in such a clear fashion.

These organizations also offer youth structured opportunities to progressively take on more responsibility. At AVEY, for example, a core group of “youth mobilizers” organize other high school youth in issue-oriented campaigns, projects and rallies. Mobilizers are given wide latitude in choosing their specific roles within the organization. As the mobilizers become even more experienced, they may apply for consultant and staff positions with greater responsibility. Similarly, OCI youth mobilizers may choose where to invest their interest and skill on a specific project. A variety of leadership opportunities are available to youth as they move through the steps of action research process: issue identification; data collection, analysis and interpretation; reporting and public testimony; and organization of action-oriented coalitions of interest. Adult staff support youth in identifying and carrying out the role that best matches their interests and skills.

Organizational resources are aligned to support these structures. Both AVEY and OCI have devoted significant staff time to ensure that everybody receives sufficient training, coaching and supervision to perform their responsibilities. Prior to giving a presentation to local officials, for example, adult staff and youth come together to practice and to provide feedback to each other. In OCI, the youth mobilizers are compensated as employees for their work. And in AVEY, those youth who take on the greatest responsibility – such as leading

organizational initiatives or serving as consultants to other organizations – are compensated accordingly.

Public Action

Public action in the community is essential to the partnership culture of AVEY and OCI. Public action reinvigorates partnership values. When talking about their organizations, all youth and adults emphasize “the work” they do in community. They can describe, with clarity, the different phases and steps in organizing and implementing public action. These “stories” provide continuity in spirit for the organizations. They provide an effective means for disseminating best practices over time.

Public action also dictates the structure of the organizations. AVEY and OCI are oriented towards public action. Policies and programming are designed to ensure that (a) youth are prepared to act, (b) power analyses are conducted to determine where and how to act to have the greatest impact and (c) the organizations carefully choose and cultivate collaborations that result in a shared and coordinated action. These structures allow the organizations to become as efficient and effective as possible over time.

Public action is what makes youth-adult partnership a public idea not only within the organization, but in the community as well. By organizing highly visible events (rallies, candidate’s forums, community conversations) and creating products (research reports, documentaries, new programs), the OCI and AVEY are explicitly bringing critical attention and offering solutions, to issues of social justice. At the same time, public actions provide salient opportunities for AVEY and OCI to visibly model the idea of youth-adult partnership to the wider community. These organizations are challenging negative stereotypes about youth while demonstrating the power of young people to positively contribute to communities. This modeling is essential to the creation of sustained community support for youth engagement and youth-adult partnership over the long term.

The Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnership in Public Action

The culture of partnership within AVEY and OCI – the adoption of partnership values, the creation of partnership structures and the enactment of public action – supports the principles of youth engagement and allows the organization to have broad impacts. In fact, what makes the organizations stand out is that they are explicitly dedicated to change on multiple levels. They are working on specific policy agendas – for example predatory lending or school reform – and at the same time, they are building leadership skills among young people, building awareness among local leaders and modeling new intergenerational change strategies to the larger community.

The specific outcomes are presented in Figure 4. The research indicates that the principles of youth engagement, when supported by an organizational culture of youth-adult partnership, promote positive developmental outcomes among youth and staff. As organizations reach out to the community through public action and through the individual efforts of youth and staff, community leaders take notice and respond. The cumulative impact, over time, is that community institutions become more responsive to youth participation and to the agendas advanced by the organizations and the youth-adult partnerships.

Impacts on Youth Development

The culture of partnership existing within AVEY and OCI contributed strongly to *a sense of safety and belonging* among the young people. The youth understood deeply that the adult staff “would follow through,” and “had their backs.” They expressed that adult staff had important things to teach them and would actively help out in a crisis. The youth spoke just as passionately about their peers – the other youth mobilizers – “being there” for each other. During the focus groups, for example, it became clear that the youth knew, in a specific way, about the life challenges that their peers faced. The youth also acknowledged the accomplishments and contributions of their peers.

This sharing promoted a sense of trust, healing and interdependence among youth.

A sense of safety and belonging provided a foundation for personal growth. Moving from this base, youth were able to take risks, to “step out” and to garner the confidence to plan and implement complex projects. For many in these organizations, this *enhanced sense of efficacy and empowerment* was a powerful impact, one that the youth believed they would take with them into the future. This theme is illustrated by one youth mobilizer:

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 to be dependable.

This experience of efficacy, in turn, allowed the youth to take advantage of existing opportunities to participate and to create new opportunities. Consequently, all of the youth reported specific *gains in their sociopolitical awareness and civic competence*. The depth and thoughtfulness in their learning was impressive. The majority of youth spoke about their ability to critically analyze community problems, or in the words of OCI youth, to “explode the issues.” Youth learned how to develop agendas, communicate their concerns and persuade others. Most youth expressed a greater appreciation for the power of collective work and the need for tolerance, as indicated by the following comments by two youth mobilizers:

We feed off each other, so I think that being respectful at all times, while still holding your own values, is important. I've totally never been thrown into such a situation like this. I am surrounded by people who are so diverse. So, to realize where I stand on issues and things – and yet still have so much in common with them – it is an amazing place to be. It really helps to have learned about movements and what groups of people have gone through.

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 idea 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.

The opportunity to work with others on significant community issues also resulted in **strengthened community connections**. Working with AVEY and OCI provided youth with the chance to interact with influential community leaders, politicians, school board members and other types of professionals. While not all of these adults were supportive of the young people, of course, the youth could readily identify multiple adults with whom they had developed reciprocal and respectful relationships. These relationships helped the youth feel more emotionally connected to their schools and communities. Moreover, these relationships led to instrumental benefits. Youth gained access to information, recommendations and networks through these influential adults which led directly to jobs and referrals to needed community services. One youth concludes:

That there is such a group of adults dedicated to children's learning is amazing to me. I didn't even know. I just knew I wasn't satisfied with school and that is the reason I joined this organization. I didn't know that they would actually help me get professional experience in the field that I am interested in. They helped me get an internship as a fashion designer.

The youth spoke just as frequently about their own efforts to create emotional and instrumental connections for others. These young adults perceived themselves as organizational pioneers. They expressed a great deal of pride in knowing that they were creating opportunities for future cohorts of youth.

Impacts on Adult Staff Development

AVEY and OCI adult staff also benefited from youth-adult partnership. For these stakeholders, the central learning curve revolved around **gaining the skill, confidence and experience to establish one's personal practice**, especially in terms of working in partnership with groups of young people. With few role models and norms to emulate, staff often spoke about how they were "making it up as they went along." Staff spoke about learning when to "step up" and when to "step back" while still being aware of and "owning" their own status within the group. These adults had to learn when to "come on strong" with the group and when to be more passive. A culture of partnership within the organization accelerated this learning. Be it feedback from youth or from other staff, all of the adults spoke about how they developed their own approach to youth-adult partnership through negotiation and reflection with others.

As staff members gain confidence in their own practice, **partnering with youth becomes a powerful source of generativity**. That is, the staff felt as though they had extended their own

FIGURE 4: Youth-Adult Partnership in Public Action: Different Levels of Impact

Impacts on Youth Development

- **Safety & Belonging:** Youth feel accepted, supported and respected within the organization. They experience a strong sense of collective identity and pride in organization membership.
- **Efficacy & Empowerment:** Youth increase confidence in their ability to effect change within their settings, both as individuals and as members of a group. They come to “own” their own expertise and accomplishments as community leaders.
- **Sociopolitical Awareness & Civic Competence:** Youth learn how critically analyze the relationship between their own lived experience and larger social, economic and political structures. Youth also gain the knowledge (understanding of political systems and processes), attitudes (tolerance) and skills (public speaking, group facilitation, deliberation) they need to participate as civic actors.
- **Community Connections:** Youth gain a deeper understanding of their community and a closer connection with their peers. Adults connect youth with professional networks and opportunities.

Impacts on Adult Staff Development

- **Confidence & Competence:** Adults develop the 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.

Impacts on Community Leaders

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

Impacts on Institutions

- **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 public decision making bodies (e.g., school boards, local government) reflect the critical interests, concerns and priorities of young people. Youth raise new, complex issues that require a more nuanced response.
- **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.

contribution and productivity within the organization. Some of the older staff in the two organizations spoke to the satisfaction of passing along their historical understanding and personal experience with social movements. Others spoke about teaching “tried and true” organizing strategies. This “passing of the torch” clearly helps to sustain the motivation of staff.

Impacts on Adult Community Leaders

Not having partnered directly with youth in the past, many of the adult leaders in the study – whether a school administrator, organizational board member, or city politician – initially harbored some question about the ability of youth to work productively with adults. These concerns were not realized, however. Rather, all of the leaders were impressed with the high level of youth motivation and competence that they observed. These adults commonly described youth mobilizers as being “prepared,” “thoughtful,” and “respectful.” In brief, Y-AP *subverts the assumptions, often negative, of community leaders*. One Nashville leader observed:

When I think of Community IMPACT, I think of youth gathering outside of the City Council office last year. The youth had really thought out their position, they were very organized in a way that you don’t usually see in youth. You can tell the students think about things critically. They are not just voicing a typically teenage opinion because they are upset or didn’t get their way. It’s like: “This is what needs to be improved. And, here are some steps that we think can be taken.”

These types of experiences are powerful. After collaborating with youth on specific events, all of the leaders reported that, over time, they became *stronger advocates for youth participation*. They took steps to enhance youth voice in community governance. External adult leaders were not the

only ones who deepened their understanding of youth capacity through Y-AP. The adult staff of AVEY and OCI, in their role as community leaders, also experienced a learning curve as they worked with youth over time. One youth mobilizer explained how the adult staff listened and learned from youth during the first year of the program:

By the end of the year, I guess they [organizational leaders] were kind of surprised by how much potential we had. And the next year, they knew. They listened, you know. I think they realized that, wow, the youth, we have a good resource here.

Impacts on Community Institutions

AVEY and OCI have come to symbolize high quality youth participation within their communities. Their focus on partnership, their public action and their positive reputation have allowed them to have a broad impact. First, *youth participation is becoming an institutionalized expectation*. Policy makers in both cities, for example, are coming to view young people as constituents. They are taking the initiative, on their own, to solicit the opinion of young people. In Nashville, city council and school board members emphasized how public officials are now more likely to seek out and listen to youth voice, “something that we didn’t do very well in the past.” In Austin, policies have been changed to ensure that youth participate on school district task forces and campus advisory councils.

As this collective expectation emerges in communities, *civic agendas begin to better reflect the concerns, priorities and voice of youth*. Through careful research and strategic outreach, OCI has influenced Nashville’s public agenda. Their College Access report, for example, documented neighborhood disparities in college preparation resources for high school students. According to community leaders, this report raised awareness and served as a “wake up call” for policymakers to make this issue part of

their agenda. Using similar strategies, the youth have recently taken on the practice of predatory lending in low-income neighborhoods. The issue is now on the action agendas of business groups and nonprofit organizations. According to local leaders, much of the success of AVEY and OCI is due to the way that the organizations are “persistent,” engage in “consistent messaging” and “keep the issue on the table” even after the media hype has died down.

AVEY and OCI are catalysts for collaboration and consequently, *new coalitions have been formed to take collective action on key community issues.* In addition to bringing together citizen groups with the school district to address plans to restructure “failing” high schools, for example, AVEY is leading a multi-sector council to coordinate and strengthen youth policies in Austin. OCI has recently established a new coalition of state and local leaders to address issues of predatory lending. One city council official reflected on the impact of the economic literacy work conducted by OCI over the past several years:

These guys [OCI] are the only people really talking about predatory lending. They are up against enormous odds, Tennessee is where the predatory loan industry got started. For a small, not super-funded group of young people, its an incredible impact. They started the Weathbuilding Alliance. And to have the United Way take on a [new] program – that was remarkable.

As illustrated above, *public institutions are responding to the youth-adult partnerships in ways that address specific community needs.* Responsiveness is evident at multiple levels. AVEY’s organizing within high schools, for example, has led Austin principals to affirmatively address issues of safety, privacy and racism. The district has adjusted the job descriptions of staff to strengthen the voices of parents and youth on school-wide

issues. In Nashville, OCI and its partners were not only able to fend off threatened budget cuts for school counselors, but also succeeded in increasing the numbers of counselors available to help youth in under-resourced schools prepare for college.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that when youth engagement principles become an organizational priority, good things happen. As seen by AVEY and OCI and as portrayed in Figure 1, the principles help organizations to create a culture of youth-adult partnership. The principles and culture work in tandem to have positive impacts on participating youth, staff, community leaders and public institutions. In brief, communities benefit. These benefits – be they at the individual or collective level – always appear incremental. Over time, however, the changes become substantial and significant.

Focused Organizational Leadership

We do not wish to imply that creating a culture of partnership and positively impacting youth and community is an easy task. Previous research, for example, highlights the importance of focused organizational leadership as a primary ingredient to organizational transformation and positive impact (Zeldin, Petrokubi and MacNeil, 2007; 2008). This finding was replicated in the current study. In interviewing and observing the organizational leaders of OCI and AVEY, it became clear that their commitment to principles of youth engagement, to youth-adult partnership and to community change were realized through focused and creative management. These leaders understand how to take the innovative idea of youth-adult partnership and transform it into a public idea and collective action. Three strategies stand out most clearly:

- ***Organizational leaders maintain attention on the purpose and expected outcomes of youth engagement.*** The leaders were consistently building consensus among staff, youth and community leaders that the purpose of youth engagement was not only youth development, but equally important, community change. With such agreement, the organizational leaders were best able to secure buy-in for the effort. Over time, this clarity in purpose provided stakeholders with guideposts for implementation. Youth and community outcomes became standards for accountability.
- ***Organizational leaders actively work to translate a vision of youth engagement into quality practice.*** To do so, the organizational leaders cultivated the knowledge base of all stakeholders. “Success stories” and “real life models” were shared to help youth, adults and community members visualize the practice. Organizational leaders actively “coached” stakeholders through direct experience, so that they could learn to “walk the talk.” Reflection was also key. The organizational leaders understood that both youth and adults need time to discuss best practices and emerging implementation issues.
- ***Organizational leaders continually sought to build a sense of shared ownership for the priority on youth engagement.*** While the priority may have initially been perceived by many community institutions as originating from OCI and AVEY, the leaders sought to demonstrate that youth-adult partnership is something that should be collectively owned by local stakeholders. By bringing youth “to the table” and by allowing the youth to display their competence, the organizational leaders demonstrated to community stakeholders that “this is how we do business.” By having access to youth and having positive experiences with youth, the community stakeholders gradually came to perceive youth-adult partnership as something they personally endorsed.

External Assistance for Oasis and Austin Voices

It is important to emphasize that OCI and AVEY received support from external sources at key points in their own organizational development. This support was highly influential in helping both organizations create a culture of youth-adult partnership and produce a full range of positive outcomes.

Community IMPACT (CI), as discussed in the Appendix, is a program housed in the Oasis Center, a large and well established human services

organization. In CI's early days, Oasis served as their fiscal agent. When CI merged with Oasis, however, the start-up received a number of benefits, all of which allowed the "start up" to focus more exclusively on their mission and less on the creation of their own organizational structures. Specifically, Oasis provided CI with citywide connections, thus allowing the organization to reach key stakeholders outside of their original "target" neighborhoods. The back office support was also key – Oasis provided a full range of budgetary, personal and administrative services to CI. On a program level, Oasis provided CI's youth participants with ready access to personnel counseling and career advising. And, finally, CI's staff found a new set of colleagues and peers within the larger organization of Oasis.

Similar to OCI, it is unlikely that AVEY could have achieved such a large measure of success, so quickly, without external support. Early in its development, AVEY became an affiliate of the Public Education Network (PEN) national intermediary network. This affiliation offered AVEY staff a strong source of legitimacy, as well as a sense of identity and connection to something larger than itself. PEN also provided useful resources, models and technical assistance on issues of school reform. Over time, AVEY staff have secured significant funding from PEN. This funding has been used to hire a staff person, employ young people part-time and ultimately, to launch a middle school initiative with the Austin Schools. All of this has resulted in AVEY being viewed not only as an advocate for youth in the school reform process but also as a partner in providing services. Not unimportantly, the funds were also used to furnish AVEY's office, thus helping to create an environment that fostered collaboration and professionalism.

AVEY and OCI also benefited from their relationship with the Forum for Youth Investment. While the Forum did offer the organizations some financial support, the organizational leaders did not focus on

this type of assistance during the interviews. Instead, they spoke highly about the "conceptual assistance," "contacts," and "collegial friendship" that the Forum offered to them, especially during the early, most stressful and challenging years of implementation. Staff spoke vividly about how Forum staff helped the organizations craft their core strategies of youth engagement. Specifically and most importantly, staff pointed to the Forum as a catalyst for their own organizational learning and their commitment to continuous learning. One leader observed:

They've been pushing us since before we knew what we were doing to write stuff down. This is one of the benefits of working with the Forum. I was being asked: What are you doing? You need to document that. It was this constant battering... because of that, constant self-analysis is in our DNA as an organization.

Through ongoing coaching, sometimes in person and sometimes over the phone, the Forum helped the organizations articulate and refine their theories of change. To buttress the organization's conceptual and strategic planning, the Forum exposed them to other "on the ground examples" and "robust models" for how to structure their own programming. The organizations use this information to shape the direction and design of their own programming, but also to explain and justify their approach to external stakeholders.

The Forum also connected OCI and AVEY to national networks. In addition to sparking ongoing communications between OCI and AVEY staff, the Forum helped the organizations connect with a broad array of national experts and foundations. The Forum, according to one leader, provided him with "access to a broader conversation" about youth development. Since both organizations are pioneering youth-community hybrid models in their communities

and felt somewhat isolated at times, the leaders appreciated that the Forum staff could function as peers who were able to brainstorm and offer perspective on their work. One leader noted of the support received from the Forum:

I think they've been really more than wonderful personal friends of ours. I mean, they always take my calls, they always talk through what I want to talk through and they always have vouched for us with national vendors and tried to get us in front of some national funders.

Future Research

We hope this report provokes further research that examines, concurrently, *the individual and collective aspects* of youth engagement. As highlighted in this research, principles of youth engagement and a culture of youth-adult partnership underlie quality practice and positive outcomes. Most certainly, we need to know more about how organizational managers create and sustain such a culture. Such research, we believe, will advance discourse about the types of benchmarks that practitioners may use to demonstrate their progress when adopting youth engagement and youth-adult partnership as core organizational approaches to practice.

This research also highlights that youth engagement, when implemented in a quality manner, has powerful and broad effects on youth, adults and community institutions. These results remind us that youth engagement is not only about youth development, it is about community health. We most certainly need more research exploring the community-level impacts of youth-adult partnerships in public action. Until that research is conducted, documented and widely disseminated, it is unlikely that youth engagement will become a sustainable public idea or practice.

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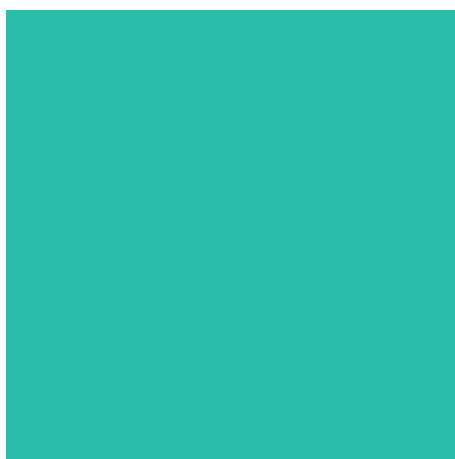
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CASE STUDY

Austin Voices for Education and Family (AVEY)

Introduction

Overview of Austin Voices for Education and Youth

Established in 2002, Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY) is an advocacy and intermediary organization that brings the voices of diverse Austin residents – in particular students and their families – into public discussion around education and youth issues. AVEY’s mission is to “mobilize the community to strengthen schools and expand opportunities for Austin’s youth.” Towards this end, AVEY uses a multilevel approach to change that involves outreach and advocacy at the campus, district and citywide level.

Engaging Youth on Campus and Citywide

There are multiple “pathways” through which young people come to participate in Austin Voices. The Garza Youth Mobilizers after-school program, located in an alternative high school, is the core model for youth engagement in AVEY. About 6-8 mobilizers are hired each year to draw attention to district-wide issues through youth-driven events such as rallies, public hearings and discussion forums. An AVEY adult organizer coaches youth in developing and carrying out these projects. High school and college students with a high level of experience and commitment work with AVEY as Youth Consultants. Consultants advise AVEY adult staff and community partners on specific projects such as: new program development, event planning and fundraising.

While the youth mobilizers and consultants organize youth citywide, Stand Up Club members carry out action projects related to specific concerns on their own campus. AVEY adult organizers work in three under-resourced high schools to facilitate weekly meetings with groups of about 10-20 students to identify and address campus issues such as unsafe facilities, lack of class materials and teacher behavior. Stand Up Club students also organize community-building events to foster mutual understanding and support among students, families and school staff.

In addition to providing youth with hands-on training and support in carrying out action projects, AVEY also offers classroom-based learning opportunities. Stand Up Club students participate in monthly trainings on topics such as: community organizing, group facilitation, public speaking and research. Youth from across the city are invited to participate in Social Justice Summer School, where they learn social movement history and strategies from veteran youth and adult community organizers. At Garza High School, AVEY staff people co-teach with school staff a service learning course on social movement history for which students receive social studies credit.

Influencing Public Institutions

At the same time that they are mobilizing youth for change at the local level, AVEY adults and youth also work from within the public system. They sit on district governance bodies and campus advisory boards in order to provide direct input into policymaking. As part of this strategy, AVEY facilitates “community conversations” to solicit the opinions of community members from across the city, especially those who live in marginalized areas such as public housing. AVEY then compiles these findings into reports which they use to inform their advocacy with school district leaders.

AVEY also directly influences the policies and practices of public institutions through system-wide initiatives. They are providing resources, training and support to promote youth development and service learning in middle schools district-wide. As part of the Ready by 21 Initiative, AVEY is also taking the lead on the development and support of a citywide youth council.

Study Context

Austin Voices evolved with guidance and support from two influential national organizations: the Forum for Youth Investment and the Public Education Network. This report summarizes key findings from research, conducted by Community Youth Connections and commissioned by the

Forum for Youth Investment, to document the promising practices and positive impacts of AVEY. This report is based on information collected via interviews, observation and focus groups with 4 AVEY adult staff members, 2 youth consultants and 10 youth mobilizers. Researchers also interviewed 6 key community leaders in order to gain multiple perspectives on how AVEY has impacted local organizations. AVEY documents and media were analyzed to provide additional insight. AVEY staff provided feedback to the research team at several points throughout the study.

At the time of this study in 2007, AVEY was emerging from a significant period of growth. In addition to operating their core programs – Garza Youth Mobilizers and community conversations – AVEY was leading three collaborative projects designed to promote youth-adult partnership in public institutions: engaging residents in the high school redesign process; providing resources to encourage middle schools to adopt youth development; and coordinating a citywide youth council. This report provides a snapshot of Austin Voices during this critical phase of development.

Three key questions organize the presentation of this report: 1) How do key stakeholders describe the *niche* of Austin Voices in the community? 2) What types of *impacts* are emerging from the work of Austin Voices? and 3) What are the core *organizational practices* that support these positive outcomes?

Organizational Niche

Austin Voices Fills a Critical Gap in the Austin Community

During the study, we asked participants to describe for us the “niche” of Austin Voices in order to get a sense of where the organization fit in the local field. Talking about niche moves us beyond the official rhetoric to a more informal impression of what stakeholders think that the organization “is all about.” Diverse study participants – youth mobilizers and youth consultants, adult staff, board members, public officials, agency partners – all agreed that AVEY plays a unique, yet critical, role in the city. Several indicated that AVEY emerged to “fill a vacuum” in education advocacy by offering resources and information not available from other organizations in the city. All described AVEY as an innovative leader and model. Stakeholders repeatedly returned to two concepts in describing the niche of Austin Voices: 1) expanding participation and representation in the public dialogue around education and 2) promoting opportunities for youth-adult partnership in schools and communities.

Expanding Participation and Representation in Public Dialogue Around Education Issues

All study participants raised the issue of “voice.” More specifically, they focused on how AVEY promotes the inclusion of diverse students and their families – especially those whose voices are seldom heard in public discussion – in community dialogue around education issues. One school board member describes how the presence of Austin Voices has raised awareness of the need to integrate students and their families into the dialogue around public education issues:

I think for a while student voices have been excluded [from discussion of public education issues]. There has been a surge to bring back that voice. And Austin Voices is not just about the students – it is also about empowering the other partner, the parent... the time was right for Austin Voices.

Austin Voices expands participation and representation in three key ways. First, *Austin Voices is strengthening the capacity of diverse youth and their families to participate in public dialogue.* Their forums and activities offer a safe and accessible environment for local residents to build their skills and knowledge through on-going study and discussion of important issues.

In addition to building the participation capacity of students and families, stakeholders indicate that *Austin Voices is facilitating the two-way flow of information between schools, students and families.* Many study participants suggested that AVEY serves as a “bridge” between the public school system and the community. They document the concerns expressed by community members and communicate these concerns to policymakers. At the same time, community conversations and newsletters translate complex education policy information into terms that students and families can relate to. One AVEY board member explained that the organization is a “neutral provider of information” on public education issues, saying: “Austin Voices isn’t necessarily the cheerleader, but we’re the group that gets the information out there so people know what’s going on and can be involved in it.”

And finally, *Austin Voices is increasing community engagement and accountability for public education.* Stakeholders described the organization as a “critical friend” that provides resources and support to the district while at the same time sharing feedback that may be critical of current policy.

Expanding Opportunities for Youth-Adult Partnership in Schools and Communities

In talking with stakeholders, it is clear that Austin Voices is seen as the “go to” group for youth voice in Austin. By placing youth in visible roles in public work, *Austin Voices is demonstrating that youth can serve as leaders and change agents in the present tense.* Not only are they modeling Y-AP with

their organization, but ***Austin Voices is advocating for policies and systems change to support Y-AP.*** AVEY does not want to be the only “youth voice” organization in the city – they are working to help make sure the practice becomes the norm across a wide range of community organizations and public institutions. As innovators in this area, they are able to help institutions such as the school district to develop policies that ensure youth are engaged in meaningful and supportive manner. One school district administrator described how, through “persistent messaging” and “quiet infiltration,” Austin Voices has assisted the district in making a “seismic shift” in the way it does business:

AVEY is a community partner that taught us a lot about community outreach. The district always has included students, to some extent, in conversations. Historically, it’s been about things like speed bumps, innocuous kinds of topics. It was a sort of novel idea about three years ago that [AVEY] introduced: bringing students into really substantive discourse about things that really matter about their education... AVEY has managed to get attention of leaders in the district and now those leaders expect that there will be student representation on district bodies.

Austin Voices is providing practical resources and support to partner organizations seeking to adopt Y-AP. As in the above quote, AVEY was repeatedly described as a “good partner” that is willing to put in the work necessary to create the types of system change they are advocating for. A key example of this is AVEY’s leadership in the start-up of a citywide youth council.

Organizational Impact

AVEY Leads to Powerful Outcomes for Individuals and Communities

Austin Voices works for change on multiple levels, engaging both individuals and institutions in the process. This integrated strategy means that AVEY works intensely in specific schools while acting as a key player in citywide forums. By engaging young people in the central work of this relatively small organization, Austin Voices has been able to attain significant developmental and community outcomes, as highlighted below.

Developmental Outcomes: Benefits to AVEY Youth and Adult Staff

Individual youth and adult staff gain many personal benefits from participation in this process of mobilization and partnership. For example, youth spoke easily and with great enthusiasm about their experiences with AVEY. Many of their stories and examples indicate that *they developed a sense of efficacy and personal empowerment* from the experience, as described by one Garza student:

I used to have this impression that those [policy] decisions are left up to grown-ups and that's just how it is. This class has really taught me that kids can do stuff too... AVEY has affected my personal character a lot. I feel much more confident and assured of myself. I feel empowered, like I can actually have an effect. It's a really good feeling to voice what you have learned.

Many youth described how *they gained sociopolitical awareness and civic competence* as a result of participating in AVEY. One Youth Mobilizer explained his learning in this manner:

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 idea 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.

Additionally, adult staff provided many examples of the way in which partnering with young people on social action projects promote their own development. These experienced community organizers described gaining *a sense of generativity*, or personal satisfaction from passing along their wisdom, skills and expertise to a new generation of activists.

Community Outcomes: Benefits to Adult Leaders and Public Institutions

In addition to individual gains in youth and adult members, many positive changes have occurred outside the organization, in the community leaders and institutions that AVEY is trying to engage.

For example, several adult stakeholders highlighted institutional impacts from a recent school board candidate's forum facilitated by the youth mobilizers. Youth raised new and challenging issues – such as the lack of educational opportunities for parenting students – that helped to ensure that *civic agendas better reflect the interests and concerns of diverse youth*. One AVEY board member suggested that this school board candidate's forum was also an opportunity to model effective youth-adult partnership practices to a wide audience of adults, instilling in new school board members the idea that *youth participation in civic life is becoming an institutionalized expectation* within the school district:

To me, because [a project such as the school board candidate's forum] deals with real, substantive issues and it's putting the kids right up front, not in a superficial way, but they're genuinely driving the conversation. You're not feeding the students the questions to ask the candidates. They're coming to them with the questions that are important to them. It's an opportunity for everybody, every adult in that room, to recognize and acknowledge the value, the expertise of that student, with respect to their own education.

Public sector leaders report that the “impressive” public work of AVEY youth has forced community leaders to admit and *overcome their negative stereotypes about youth*, especially youth of color. AVEY youth present information in a manner that adults are able to hear, prompting many of these community leaders to themselves *become advocates of youth-adult partnership*.

Organizational Practices

AVEY is a Model for Building a Culture of Partnership

A key strength of the Austin Voices model is that the organization successfully balances attention to youth development and community development. This is not an easy balance to maintain and one that AVEY manages with a great deal of intention and skill. A deep commitment to partnership ensures a fairly tight connection between the grassroots organizing and the policy work of the organization. Active participation by young people was repeatedly cited as being critical to the credibility and effectiveness of the organization. Therefore, it will be necessary to sustain this *culture of partnership*, as expressed through organizational values, mechanisms and public action, as AVEY expands the scope of its work.

Partnership Values

The culture of Austin Voices reflects a strong set of *partnership values*, or a shared belief that group decision making is enhanced when diverse stakeholders are involved in the process. Youth, families and adult organizers - not just administrators - are all considered 'experts' to be regularly consulted in organizational decision making. Stakeholders provided many examples of how youth input informed the overall agenda for AVEY's advocacy work, as well the structure of specific youth programs and policies.

Partnership values were evident in the respectful manner in which adult staff people interact with youth, consistently taking care to validate the young person's lived experience. Dialogue activities that promote group reflection, collaboration and mutual respect are a regular part of youth and adult meetings. Partnership values are also expressed in the collaborative approach AVEY takes in working with the school district and other partner agencies.

Partnership Structures

Austin Voices has many *partnership structures* – roles, policies and processes – in place to make sure that youth have the opportunities and support that they need to actively participate. By offering a range of "pathways" to participation, AVEY is able to engage diverse youth in their work and benefit from youth input at multiple levels of the organization. While some youth may choose to become a mobilizer, other youth prefer to express their opinion at a forum or rally, or to participate in monthly social networking events. Highly motivated and experienced youth are encouraged to work alongside adult staff as consultants on organization-wide projects such as grant writing and new program development. Once youth choose to take on a significant responsibility, the duties are formally clarified through job descriptions and ongoing feedback from adult supervisors.

Youth-adult partnership is infused throughout Austin Voices, both as an organizing strategy and as an outcome. Yet AVEY staff emphasized to us that they are a "youth-centered" rather than a "youth driven" organization, in recognition of the need for clear and complementary roles for adults. Adults describe themselves as "conductors" who help youth to channel their energy into productive action. They provide youth with practical coaching and strategic support for carrying out this action.

Public Action

The partnership values and structures within Austin Voices provide youth with the confidence and competence they need to take their participation to another level through visible *public actions*. Public actions distinguish AVEY from conventional youth leadership programs: youth are doing "real work" that directly impacts policies and programs that affect large numbers of people. AVEY youth and adults co-facilitate intergenerational dialogue around significant education issues through community conversations, rallies and candidate's

forums. Youth-produced media (photo essays, documentaries, newsletters) and message-oriented products (t-shirts, buttons) raise the visibility of AVEY issues among youth. And youth communicate insider knowledge and research-based information directly to policymakers by giving public testimony and presentations to government bodies. At the same time that youth are implementing these various public actions, AVEY adult organizers and youth mobilizers are working behind the scenes to connect these individual actions with the organization's larger campaigns. This coordinated strategy is powerful.

Public actions are designed primarily to create more equitable and responsive communities, however they are also an opportunity for AVEY publicly model youth-adult partnership to the wider community. They are challenging negative stereotypes about youth while demonstrating the power of young people to contribute to communities.

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CASE STUDY

Oasis Community IMPACT (OCI)

Introduction

Overview of Oasis Community IMPACT

Since 2000, Oasis Community IMPACT (OCI) has been working to increase educational and economic opportunities for young people in East Nashville. The program was originally established as Community IMPACT Nashville to promote the personal development of low-income youth through service, leadership training and college scholarships. Working in partnership with the Forum for Youth Investment, OCI has since made social change a more explicit part of its strategy, in 2004 adopting a youth organizing approach for engaging youth in real-world research, outreach and action. OCI now seeks to affect not only individual youth, but also the larger systems that limit their education and economic opportunities.

A neighborhood-focused program housed in an East Nashville high school, OCI works intensely with 12 youth from three local schools. These “youth mobilizers” work on teams to identify and address economic and education issues of importance to them. Youth mobilizers are paid employees who work very closely together in an office environment almost daily during the school year and summer. Youth mobilizers take their job seriously and consider themselves to be “24-7 mobilizers” who are always representing the organization. Each team of high school students is supported by 1-2 adult staff, most of whom are recent graduates of Oasis youth leadership programs.

OCI uses action research as a platform for advocacy. Starting with their own personal experience, youth mobilizers expand their understanding of issues by collecting their own local data (via surveys, interviews and focus groups) and researching information on-line. They produce reports, curricula and outreach workshops to communicate their findings to their peers and the broader community. Mobilizers also use this research in giving presentations to public bodies such as the school board, providing testimony in public hearings and developing multi-agency coalitions. Adult staff play

a critical “behind the scenes” role in helping youth to gain the attention of influential adult leaders.

Youth mobilizers manage the recruitment and selection of their peers, with most youth hired and trained during the summer program. OCI training activities address issues of power and oppression, as well as “basic skills” such as public speaking, research skills and group decision making. Adult staff regularly facilitate dialogue that encourage youth to develop a critical analysis of the root causes of social problems, or in their words: “teach youth how to explode the issues.” Each team meeting starts with a group check-in and ends with a debrief. Youth regularly facilitate teambuilding breaks.

In 2005, Community IMPACT! merged with the Oasis Center, a citywide agency which offers youth programs ranging from crisis intervention services to leadership training and media production. The merger has been productive for both organizations. The Oasis Center gained access to a social action-oriented model of youth engagement, as well a direct connection to youth and networks in East Nashville. Community IMPACT youth gained access to counseling services and connections with a citywide network of youth and adult leaders. Since the time of the study, OCI Director Anderson Williams - who managed the development of the new program model and merger with Oasis - has transitioned into a new position as Director of New Initiatives at Oasis.

Study Context

This report summarizes key findings from research commissioned by the Forum for Youth Investment and conducted by the Community Youth Connections research team of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This case study of OCI was part of a larger study documenting the promising practices and positive impacts of organizations engaging youth in social change work. Researchers Linda Camino and Julie Petrokubi conducted a site visit to OCI in summer 2007.

This report is based on information collected via interviews, observation and focus groups with 4 Oasis adult staff members, 3 young adult staff, 11 current youth mobilizers and 1 former youth mobilizer. Researchers also interviewed 5 adult community leaders in order to gain multiple perspectives on the broader impact of OCI in Nashville. OCI documents and media were also analyzed to provide additional insight. OCI staff provided feedback to the research team at several points in the study.

Three key questions organize the presentation of this report: 1) How do key stakeholders describe the niche of Oasis Community IMPACT in the community? 2) What types of impacts are emerging from the work of Oasis Community IMPACT? and 3) What are the core organizational practices that support these positive outcomes? This report is designed to provide a snapshot of Oasis Community IMPACT during this particular point in its development. Additional information on the larger study will be available in an upcoming publication from the Forum for Youth Investment.

Organizational Niche

Oasis Community IMPACT is “The Real Deal”

During the study, we asked participants to describe for us the “niche” of Oasis Community IMPACT, with the goal of getting a better idea of where the organization fit locally. Talking about niche moves us beyond the official rhetoric to a more informal impression of what stakeholders think that the program “is all about.” Diverse local stakeholders – youth mobilizers and consultants, adult staff, board members, public officials, agency partners – all portrayed OCI as being “the real deal.” In describing the role of the program in Nashville, stakeholders kept returning to the ways in which OCI was “authentic,” “dedicated” and “a good partner.” OCI has a reputation for acting with integrity and for being grounded in the interests of young people. Study participants frequently expressed that working with OCI was a refreshing experience in contrast to “politics as usual.”

Stakeholders focused on two features of the program in describing the niche of OCI: 1) OCI offers a realistic portrayal of the strengths and challenges of East Nashville youth and 2) OCI doesn’t just offer problems, they also offer solutions.

OCI Offers a Realistic Portrayal of the Strengths and Challenges of East Nashville Youth

In talking about what makes OCI “the real deal”, study participants highlighted the program’s long-term commitment to the East Nashville community and willingness to allow the “unfiltered” voices of local youth to come through. The neighborhood focus appears to be a critical feature that distinguishes OCI from other youth programs in the city. OCI was lauded by stakeholders for being able to simultaneously: a) draw attention to inequalities and injustices that limit youth and community development in East Nashville, while also b) challenging stereotypes by highlighting the abilities of youth in the community and instilling in

those youth a sense of pride in their neighborhood. This is a complex task and one that OCI seems to be managing well.

One East Nashville city council member describes the niche of OCI in this manner:

Community IMPACT is a completely unique asset in Nashville. [They provide] a direct way to have communication and thoughtful discourse with young people... During budget cycles, when we’ve had big funding questions to be decided, Community IMPACT has been there and has been able to give a student perspective – a youth voice perspective – that is decidedly different from the blue ribbon, magnet school kids, private school kids from all over Nashville. It is what’s really going on in a very urban, very challenging area of town.

As representative of this rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, this council member says that without OCI: “the voices of the kids who have always been here can get lost” in a public dialogue which he views as dominated by newer and more privileged members of the community. A youth mobilizer puts a finer point on what makes OCI “the real deal” in the eyes of youth:

I think what makes that group so powerful is because it’s the students that are livin’ it who are actually telling the stories, not just some adult who is concerned about what’s going on.

OCI doesn’t just offer problems, they also offer solutions. They are a good partner.

OCI has been successful in getting issues on the agenda. OCI is not necessarily offering adults brand

new issues. Sometimes they simply provide leaders with a new angle on an issue; or use the “shock” of youth voice to refresh adult engagement in the issue. Stakeholders explained that what is most powerful about the OCI strategy is that *they have been able to sustain attention on the issue beyond the initial hype*. They do this by: a) communicating the message in a manner that will be heard by influential adults, b) pairing personal stories with group-level data and c) building alliances and other structures to expand understanding of the issue and move the community towards action. OCI seems to be effective in part because they offer specific targets and strategies for action on issues – such as education equity – that may have before seemed intractable.

OCI’s willingness to be part of the solution reflects their core value of portraying youth as agents of change, rather than simply victims of oppression. For example, in addition to conducting research and doing outreach on financial literacy issues, OCI youth and adults are spearheading a coalition to address the issue of predatory lending in East Nashville. Rather than waiting for adults to create opportunities to address the issue, these youth are inviting adults to join them at the table.

Another way that OCI takes part in the solution is by using popular education strategies as part of their organizing. In their report on college access opportunities for youth in East Nashville public schools, the mobilizers included empirical data as well as practical information such as a college prep checklist to assist their peers in making sure that they are taking the right steps for getting into college. The Economics team regularly offers financial literacy workshops to the community. OCI produces accessible materials and resources make the issues tangible – for their peers, their families and for the adult decision makers they target.

Organizational Impact

OCI Leads to Powerful Outcomes for Individuals and Communities

Oasis Community IMPACT works for change on multiple levels, engaging both individuals and institutions in the process. This section discusses some of the highlights.

Developmental Outcomes: Benefits to OCI Youth and Adult Staff

Individual youth and adult staff gain many personal benefits from participation in this process of mobilization and partnership. We heard a great deal during the site visit about the many ways in which participation in OCI enhanced the lives of youth mobilizers. First, youth expressed an *increased sense of safety and belonging*. Youth spoke with warmth about their teammates, referring to OCI as “a workplace we call family.” They described the program as a “safe space” where “you can tell people anything and its all going to stay within the group.” Youth described this sense of trust and mutual respect as being essential to their ability to work as a team on collective action projects.

In addition to developing positive relationships with their peers, youth gain *new community connections* through their partnerships with adults. Adult staff people were described as being reliable role models, who demonstrate for youth how to interact with – and sometimes disagree with – others in a manner that is respectful and fair. One youth mobilizer described his impression of adult staff:

What I have seen with all of these adults here is that they all show responsibility... Like where I come from, I have never seen as many adults help kids and be on time and stuff.

Several former youth mobilizers told us stories about how instrumental relationships that they developed with adults through the program helped them in future

education and employment endeavors. Additionally, youth mobilizers gained a deeper understanding of resources and issues in East Nashville. As part of the action research process, youth mobilizers *expanded their sociopolitical awareness and civic competence*. During our focus group, youth expressed that they were “blown away” to learn how using high-interest payday lending services may limit the financial mobility of their families. They also say that OCI taught them how to “break down the issues” into manageable steps for action. In addition to developing knowledge and skills, youth expressed that they gained an *increased sense of efficacy and empowerment* from the process of collective action. One veteran mobilizer explained how OCI helped her to channel her frustration into productive action by developing “professional skills” she needed to effectively engage with influential adults:

Community IMPACT just brought out some of my good qualities. Like, I’ve always been outspoken. But now I know how to speak out in a good way so that my voice can be heard... I can get a group of adults’ attention and get them to listen to me, conference with me, like a peer.

Youth are not the only ones who benefit from participation in OCI. Adult staff cite many examples of how working with the teams *enhanced their own confidence and competence in partnering with youth*. Given that OCI staff are pioneering a new way of working with youth, adult staff say that they learn “on the job,” relying on continuous feedback from youth to let them know when to “step up” and when to “be more passive.” The experience of youth-adult partnership has been essential in helping these adults to develop their own youth work practice.

Community Outcomes: Benefits to Adult Leaders and Public Institutions

In addition to individual gains in OCI youth and adult staff, many positive changes have occurred outside

the program, in the adult community leaders and institutions that they are trying to engage. Public sector leaders report that the work of OCI has forced community leaders to admit and **overcome their negative stereotypes about youth**, especially youth of color. They describe OCI youth as being very “professional,” “respectful” and “prepared” in their interactions with adults leaders.

OCI youth present information in a manner that adults are able to hear, prompting many of those leaders to become **advocates of youth-adult partnership**. One local business leader described the power of seeing youth mobilizers in action:

When I think of Community IMPACT, I think of youth gathering outside of the City Council Office last year. The youth had really thought out their position... you can tell that the students think about things critically. They are not just voicing a typical teenage opinion because they are upset or didn't get their way. They are like: This is what needs to be improved. And here are some steps that we think can be taken.

As a result of their successes in engaging adult community leaders, OCI has also been able to impact public institutions on a number of levels. We may trace this impact by looking at recent efforts by youth mobilizers to raise awareness of why more East Nashville youth do not attend college. After identifying college access as a major barrier for local youth, the mobilizers analyzed national trends and collected data from their peers in order to get a better understanding of the issue. Their study revealed that while 90% of students surveyed in East Nashville schools aspired to post-secondary education, less than one third had met with a guidance counselor about how to get there. In addition to publishing their findings in a report titled *College Access from the Inside Out*, OCI youth

offered presentations and workshops on the issue. A documentary was also produced chronicling how OCI contributed to significantly increasing the college enrollment rate of graduates from one high school.

OCI's on-going efforts to “keep the issue on the table” have had several outcomes for the community. First, **they helped to make youth-adult partnership an institutionalized expectation**. Local public officials, such as city council and school board members, now come to OCI to solicit youth input on policy issues. One school board member says that the report and subsequent presentation by youth mobilizers “had a major impact on of our way of thinking about the issues, how we approach policy.”

Second, **they succeeded in getting the issue of college access on the agenda** of several powerful groups, including a citywide coalition of community-based organizations and foundations working on education issues. Third, **new coalitions have formed to take action on the issue**. For example, the report resulted in a new partnership between Vanderbilt University and several public schools to provide college counseling to high school students.

And finally, **the public school system responded with changes in resources, policies and programs**. For example, the schools were able to not only retain threatened funding for school counselors in their budget, but they also placed an additional counselor in all high schools. This is critical for high schools such as those attended by OCI youth, where the small counseling staff is so overwhelmed with students in crisis that there is little time or resources left for helping students get into college.

Organizational Practices

OCI is a Model for Building a Culture of Partnership

Oasis Community IMPACT successfully balances attention to youth and community development. This is not an easy balance to maintain and one that OCI manages with a great deal of intention and skill. A key ingredient to maintaining this balance is OCI's organizational *culture of partnership*, as expressed through partnership values, partnership mechanisms and public action. As one staff person explained, the program "starts with the youth and then moves to the issues."

Partnership Values

The culture of OCI reflects a strong set of *partnership values*, or a shared belief that group decision making is enhanced when diverse stakeholders are involved in the process. The words and actions of adult staff – from the college students who support the teams to the Executive Director of Oasis – communicates that youth-adult partnership is a core organizational priority, not just a side project.

In response to this affirmation from adults, youth clearly "own the work" and perceive themselves to be "experts". Youth and adults are expected to listen and learn from each other and youth expressed comfort in persuading adults in order to reach consensus. On-going dialogue around issue of trust, power and authority - among adult staff, between youth and adults and among youth - helps to make this type of collaborative relationship possible by "keeping tabs on respect."

Partnership Structures

OCI has *partnership structures* – roles, policies and processes – in place to make sure that youth have the opportunities and support that they need to actively participate. All youth are expected to find a way to contribute their personal "gifts" to the group and are held accountable by their peers and supervisors. Youth have defined roles outlined in position descriptions and are provided with the

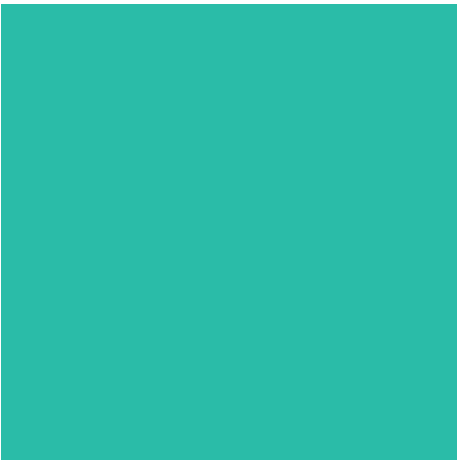
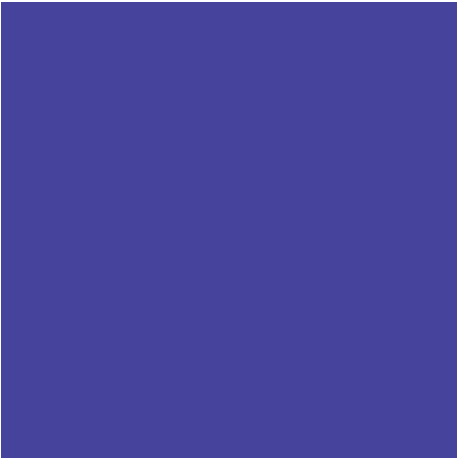
resources (coaching, compensation, office supplies) they need to accomplish their work. OCI uses a peer-to-peer recruitment process and more experienced youth are expected to coach their peers.

Yet there is a clear and complementary role for adults in OCI. Adults "keep youth on their game" while taking youth concerns seriously. Adults provide intensive coaching to "over prepare" youth so that they may effectively interact with powerful adults in stressful situations. One youth mobilizer explained youth and adult roles in this manner: youth are responsible for mobilizing their peers, parents and teachers, while adults act as their "promoters" by bringing the issues to groups that are not part of the youth's daily lives. In this way, adults help youth to get more exposure for their work.

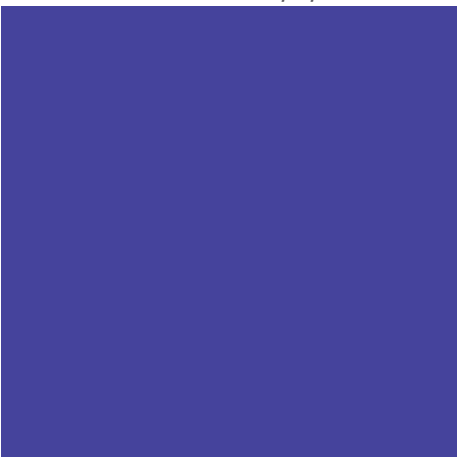
Public Action

The partnership values and mechanisms within OCI provide youth with the confidence and competence they need to take their participation to another level through visible *public actions*. Public actions distinguish OCI from conventional youth leadership programs: youth are doing "real" work that directly impacts policies and programs that affect large numbers of people.

OCI youth communicate insider knowledge and research-based information directly to policymakers by giving public testimony and presentations to government bodies. They also produce events, workshops and reports that engage the broader community in intergenerational dialogue around significant issues. These public actions reinforce the internal partnership values of OCI, while at the same time demonstrating the value of youth-adult partnership to the entire community.



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Recommended Resources

Free Child Project

<http://www.freechild.org>

The Freechild Institute teaches youth and adults to work together and transform the world in positive, powerful ways. The website contains resources and guides for elevating youth voice in community projects and organizations.

How I See Myself, How Others See Me: Photo Voice Handbook

<http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/photo-voice-handbook.pdf>

A handbook detailing how to complete a Photo Voice project. Photo Voice is a way of collecting data where participants take photographs that represent what they think and feel about a particular topic. Although primarily for use by staff, this resource contains materials that can be useful to both staff and students as they complete photo voice projects.

Institute for Youth Success

Innovative Ideas to Build Youth Voice in Your Youth Program (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wxLUQZCFoI>

Webinar featuring Education Northwest researcher Julie Petrokubi to learn ways organizations can go beyond youth input to create Youth-Adult Partnerships that strengthen services. Includes an overview of the research on Youth-Adult Partnership, best practice tips for implementation, and examples of two Oregon-based organizations working to build Youth-Adult Partnerships in their organizational settings.

Oregon Health Authority, Youth Participatory Action Research

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/YOUTH/Pages/youth.aspx>

The YPAR Curriculum was developed in partnership with the Institute for Community Research (ICR) as a tool to support Youth-Adult Partnerships and help youth-serving organizations integrate youth voice into their work.

Oregon Healthy Teens information

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/SURVEYS/OREGONHEALTHYTEENS/Pages/background.aspx>

The Oregon Healthy Teens (OHT) Survey is an anonymous and voluntary survey of 8th and 11th grade youth conducted in odd-numbered years. Results for the 2017 OHT survey are available by county as PDF files.

Speak Out, Listen Up! Tools for Using Student Perspectives and Local Data for School Improvement

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2014035.pdf

Toolkit providing educators a systematic means to gather and analyze data by eliciting and listening to student voice to inform school improvement efforts.

Technical Assistance Grants from The Ford Family Foundation

<http://www.tff.org/how-we-work/grants/current-funding-opportunities/technical-assistance-grants-0>

Small grants from The Ford Family Foundation. They may be used for organizational planning and/or capacity building related to Youth-Adult Partnership.

Understanding and Eradicating Adultism

<https://freechild.org/introduction-to-adultism/>

Helpful link for understanding the role and positionality of adults in Youth-Adult Partnership.

Youth-Adult Partnerships in Decision Making: Disseminating and Implementing an Innovative Idea into Established Organizations and Communities.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1523/ac6dc144d65f964e10964868d38b435dc81c.pdf>

Academic article focused on a case study of one program seeking to implement Youth-Adult Partnership into its organizational structure. The article identifies the goals, leverage points, and strategies as well as challenges to implementing Y-AP.

Zeldin, Shepherd, Petrokubi, Julie, and MacNeil, Carole. (2008). Youth-Adult Partnerships in Decision Making: Disseminating and Implementing an Innovative Idea into Established Organizations and Communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(262-277).

Youth Mainstreaming Guide

<https://freechild.org/youth-mainstreaming-guide/>

Link to an online published book detailing how to incorporate youth into any aspect of organizational decision making.

Youth On Board

<http://www.youthonboard.org/>

National organization focused on student and youth organizing with an emphasis on urban communities.

For more information about incorporating Youth-Adult Partnership into your organization and professional practice, contact the Institute for Youth Success.

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