

Youth-adult

Partnership

toolkit



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**CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality is a youth-led organization. Our mission is for all young people to have the power to make decisions about their sexual, reproductive and love lives. During recent years, CHOICE has worked in alliances to implement programs that aim at advancing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). These alliances<sup>1</sup> have created the space to think about how to meaningfully engage with young people while working towards these goals. One of our proposed strategies has been to build positive Youth-Adult Partnerships (YAPs). A Youth-Adult Partnership is a partnership in which both young people and adults are equally involved and share power. They listen to each other, define the aims of the program or activity together, and share decision-making. Young people themselves can concretely address their issues and realities and can work on defining sustainable solutions together with adults. We believe that in positive YAPs, both the young people and the adults benefit, and that program outcomes will be more responsive towards young people's needs – a real win-win situation for everyone involved!**

# Introduction

# YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS AND MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

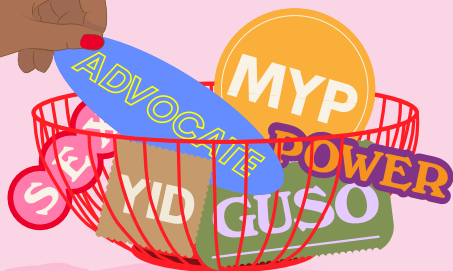
A term that is often confused with Youth-Adult partnerships, is meaningful youth participation (MYP). While MYP and YAPs go hand in hand, they are not the same thing.

CHOICE defines MYP as follows: Young people are diverse rights-holders, and meaningful youth participation (MYP) is a right of all young people, guaranteed by various international agreements. MYP means that young people can participate on equal terms with adults, or work independently, in organizations as well as in all stages of programming and policy making: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. For this reason, mechanisms must be in place for young people to have an active role, in which their voices are heard and respected. These mechanisms can take different forms, such as youth representatives in a board, a youth advisory body or a fully youth-led organization.

CHOICE believes that young people should participate in a meaningful way in all organizations and programs. In 2012, over half of the world population was under 30, counting over 3.5 billion people worldwide – and this number of young people is growing.<sup>2</sup> This means that young people are not only the future, but they are here right now, and it is crucial that their voices are heard. Moreover, when participation of young people is truly meaningful, it benefits not only the young people, but also the program, policy or organization they participate in, and society as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

So, what is the relationship between YAPs and MYP? Basically, YAPs are a form of MYP, and, as mentioned in the introduction, embody a partnership between young people and adults, where both parties have equal decision-making power (they are partners). Importantly, young people and adults are seen as equal partners, who mutually recognize the value and contribution of both parties. Both young people and adults are meaningfully involved at every step of the way, each bringing in their own unique expertise and skillset. Sticking to this definition, a YAP would always be associated with a MYP. However, as you can also see in the Flower of Participation<sup>4</sup>, a YAP is one of six existing forms of MYP. For example, young people can participate in a meaningful way while working independently and not sharing their decision-making power with adults – so MYP does not always involve a YAP.

**“CHOICE believes that young people should participate in a meaningful way in all organizations and programs.”**



1. Some of those programs are Get Up Speak Out and Yes I Do. Visit our website for more information 2. <https://blog.euromonitor.com/special-report-the-worlds-youngest-populations/> 3. See CHOICE position paper on MYP: <https://www.youthdoit.org/assets/Uploads/MYPpositionpaper.pdf>

## SOME BACKGROUND: WHY THIS TOOLKIT?

In the programs CHOICE works on, YAPs form a key strategy to ensure MYP and in turn, successful program outcomes. However, the midterm evaluation that was done for the Get Up Speak Out program showed that even though structures were created to meaningfully involve young people in the programs, young people do not always feel trusted by adults. They also miss a safe space in which they can have open discussions and dialogues with adults, when it comes to YAPs.<sup>5</sup>

Motivated by these findings, CHOICE commissioned an explorative study to gain greater insight into the overall picture of YAPs within SRHR, which was commissioned by Filipa Oitavén. While it is broadly understood that there are challenges with the implementation of these partnerships, CHOICE was interested in learning more about young people and adults who are involved in YAPs. For this purpose, we made a survey that was completed by 34 young people and 6 adults<sup>6,7</sup>, along with 17 qualitative interviews (two internal one-on-one interviews with CHOICE staff, plus external qualitative interviews with 15 representatives of 10 national and international development organizations), one focus group session, a few informal conversations and participant-observation at a Youth Council meeting. One of the most relevant results from the study was that trust is crucial in the implementation of YAPs. Here, we want to provide some tips that can help you in the setting up or improvement of a YAP.

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: TRUST BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS.

By talking with young people and adults during the research, it became apparent that trust was a major issue. The lack of trust that adults have in young people's work/skills was mentioned on several occasions. And vice-versa: young people also tend to show a lack of trust towards adults. For this reason, the research delved went further into the trust issue and found that there are some common 'trust builders', as well as 'trust killers'.

Based on conversations with young people and adults, we have put together the following lists. We believe that by using the 'trust building' list, and by being aware of the 'trust killer' list, YAPs can be created more successfully, or improved.

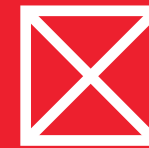
**“By talking with young people and adults during the research, it became apparent that trust was a major issue.”**



4. For more information on the Flower of Participation, see YOU(TH) Do IT! 5. Get Up Speak Out Program, midterm evaluation 2018 6. For the research's survey, young person was defined as someone no older than 30 years old. However, during the in-country research, this concept became more flexible, since different countries have different definitions of young people. 7. From this total, 22 respondents identified as female and 17 respondents as male. 25 respondents lived in an urban area/city, 7 in a rural area, and 6 in sub-urban areas. 20 of the respondents were Black/African, 7 were Asian, 4 identified with other ethnicities, and only 1 participant was Native American. From this total, 22 respondents identified as female and 17 respondents as male. 25 respondents lived in an urban area/city, 7 in a rural area, and 6 in sub-urban areas. 20 of the respondents were Black/African, 7 were Asian, 4 identified with other ethnicities, and only 1 participant was Native American.



**TRUST  
BUILDERS**



**TRUST  
KILLERS**

# TRUST BUILDERS

- ✓ **CREATE A DEFINITION OF TRUST** early in the partnership, e.g. define clearly what you need and expect from each other, as well as how to respectfully work together and why you find it important to work in a YAP.
- ✓ **LIVE UP TO YOUR DEFINITION OF TRUST**, building on it over time.
- ✓ **SIT SIDE BY SIDE** at a table (or on a couch!) Instead of opposite each other. This contributes to friendly and respectful conversations.
- ✓ **ENCOURAGE CONVERSATIONS TO BE FACT-BASED** and work towards setting a common set of facts. This means avoid addressing the situation based on stereotypes, and rather focus on the facts of why something is not working or needs to be done differently.
- ✓ **BE OPEN TO SEE THE WORLD THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S EYES** and ask others to elaborate on their views.
- ✓ **TAKE TIME TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER** as people. Share personal stories and facts that can help build a trusting relationship.
- ✓ **ACKNOWLEDGE THERE WILL BE CONFLICT** and be prepared for it in advance; have a set of options for conflict resolution.
- ✓ **DEVELOP A CULTURE OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**, so that everyone in the partnership will feel appreciated.
- ✓ **SYSTEMATICALLY EXAMINE THE PARTNERSHIP** and recognize a lack of participation as an alarm-bell that something needs change. Agree on mechanisms for building accountability in the partnership, e.g. consensus-based decision making or feedback loops.



# TRUST KILLERS

- ✗ **ARGUING ABOUT WHAT CONSTITUTES A PARTNERSHIP** and skepticism regarding the partnership being worth the time.
- ✗ **SITTING ACROSS FROM EACH OTHER**, not listening to each other and being defensive (trying to prove the other wrong).
- ✗ **USING ANECDOTAL STORIES BASED UPON STEREOTYPES** you have, instead of facts.
- ✗ **ASSUMING YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD IS THE RIGHT ONE** and lacking openness to the perceptions of others.
- ✗ **STAYING DISTANCED** and/or not interacting much.
- ✗ **DISGUIISING OR AVOIDING CONFLICT**; not addressing frustration or disagreement in the relationship.
- ✗ **ASSUMING CONTINUITY OF THE PARTNERSHIP** over time and ignoring passive participation and diminished interest. Looking at negative feedback as a failure and avoiding giving and receiving it.

**“We believe that by using the ‘trust building’ list, and by being aware of the ‘trust killer’ list, YAPs can be created more successfully, or improved”.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS – TOWARDS POSITIVE AND SUCCESSFUL YAPS

Building a positive Youth-Adult partnership can be difficult for everyone involved, and besides trust, there is plenty more that can make or break the experience. However, with good intentions and this list of recommendations, we think you will be well on your way! The recommendations presented in this toolkit can help (SHRH) alliances and organizations to improve YAP models and engage youth and adults in meaningful partnerships. It is important to realize that the experiences and needs of different organizations, and those of young people and adults, vary considerably, meaning there is no single blueprint for a successful YAP. The type of approach to improve existing YAPs or initiate new ones will be different for each specific case, so remaining flexible and considering the needs of those involved is key! The recommendations presented below are based upon Filipa's research, as well as the experiences of CHOICE and partners.

**“However, with good intentions and this list of recommendations, we think you will be well on your way!”**



## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAKING YAPS WORK

### **Commitment is key: select young people and adults who are eager to engage in the interchange that YAPs are all about.**

Young people and adults who are eager to engage will probably be much more involved, seek opportunities to involve others, show up to meetings, and generate positive energy and excitement in the room. Different young people are at different stages in their development and in their readiness to assume responsibility. Being clear about the goals of the partnership and the roles that young people will play can help in identifying young people who are reliable and committed to the objectives of the project. Equally, quality partnerships are selective about adult participants. The adults must consider young people as assets to the partnership and be ready to advocate on behalf of youth when faced with negative stereotypes about them. Of course, you might not always have the opportunity to select participants in the partnership. Sometimes you simply have to work with the people that are already there. However, commitment can also be created, and everyone's capacity can be strengthened. If you feel that this is needed, it may be helpful to invest in training on MYP and YAPs to make sure everyone involved has the right knowledge and skills.

### **Establish clear roles.**

When young people and adults start working together in a new partnership, they may be unsure about their roles. Defining clear roles helps any team function more effectively, because each member

knows what they are expected to do and accomplish. At the start of a YAP, ask both young people and adults how they want to be engaged, and consider how to get there. Where in the process can the input of young people and adults be used? What type of decisions can and should both parties make? What is a good use of both side's skills and expertise, and how will it enrich the quality of their work together?

### **Create a common goal and appreciate everyone's efforts.**

Partnerships are formed when the two sides believe that each other's expertise and input will be mutually beneficial, or when they are focused on a common goal. Ideally, youth and adults are both appreciated as having unique and valuable contributions to the partnership. Give them plenty of opportunities to explore what each person brings to the table.

### **Create wins for all, and ask adults to articulate the purpose and benefits of engaging youth as their partners (and ask them to be specific!).**

It is often easier to see the benefits of YAPs for young people. Young people can access new resources, networks and sometimes get a paid position within an organization that aligns with their values. Adults on the other hand, might think it is only youth who benefit from participating in YAPs, whilst in reality they are benefiting as much (if not more) than young people. Connecting to the interest of adults and organizations creates initial buy-in and helps sustain the partnership →

**“Make sure you incorporate a structure to ensure feedback is taken seriously and used to influence decisions.”**

over time. Tap into the interest of adults by helping them identify how YAP relates to their work priorities, interests, and goals. Even better, create situations where adults can observe the competence and commitment of young people to those same priorities and goals. Show them the benefits rather than simply talking about them! If you see young people not (fully) grasping the benefits of working with adults, do the same – show them ‘real life’ commitment of adults!

**Work with young people on maintaining their motivation and creativity while trying to get into the adult’s ‘trust sphere’.**

Young people often feel discouraged by the idea that they need to prove themselves to adult staff, while this can be a natural phase for anyone at the beginning of their careers. Help young people find and articulate their added value to adults.

**Create systematic ways to really listen, give feedback and build accountability.**

Make sure you incorporate a structure to ensure feedback is taken seriously and used to influence decisions. Stimulate YAP participants to reflect on their work regularly. This could be: creating regular moments to reflect on frustrations, challenges and best practices; and reporting back to young people to share how their input/ideas were taken on board.

**Take the time to build relationships.**

Engagement does not happen without building relationships. And of course, it takes time and practice to achieve this. Organizations should integrate sufficient time for young people and adults to not only work together, but also to create professional and personal connections. Team Building activities can be helpful and insightful and inject some fun into the process.



## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS WITH VOLUNTEERS

(E.G. ADULT STAFF PARTNERING WITH YOUTH ADVOCATES, OR YOUTH IN-COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS)

### **Give recognition to the volunteers you work with.**

Make sure you credit the young volunteers in your work, communicating this and compensating them for their contributions. This does not have to mean financial compensation, but can also be in the form of recognition, capacity strengthening or by creating opportunities. Raise awareness with organizations and in the communities where young people work as advocates/educators. Highlight the volunteer nature of their activities and the importance of their work, to promote shared respect and appreciation.

### **Make sure to allocate enough budget to cover the core expenses of volunteers, transport and other essential costs.**

Voluntary work by young people is not always rewarded and compensated the way it should be. Even though they are not paid, young volunteers should at least be compensated for any costs they make, such as transport and meals. In some cases, young people are stereotyped for not helping to provide for their families, even though they may work just as hard as paid staff. Make sure that volunteers are treated fairly and that they are not just underpaid employees – there should be growth possible as well as future opportunities (see above).

### **Ensure non-financial support for young volunteers.**

Although financial support is a significant need, young people also require and want other forms of support such as expertise (e.g. with budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, etc.), networking opportunities (e.g. events, conferences, etc.) and the possibility to interact and learn from their peers. Do not overlook the importance of supporting young people and integrate other compensation mechanisms that may empower them in different ways. The following are examples given by young people themselves: high-value internships that contribute to their capacity strengthening and lead to future opportunities, opportunities to attend workshops and conferences abroad, team-building and collective self-care activities, resources that will make their work and lives easier, e.g. bicycles for transportation or income generating activities.

**Do not overlook the importance of supporting young people and integrate other compensation mechanisms that may empower them in different ways.**



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# Youth-adult partnership toolkit

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## **Author**

*Filipa Oitavén  
Juliana Jaramillo and  
Jannemiek Evelo*

## **Special thanks to**

*Prisca Chakholoma  
Yohanna Alemayehu  
Pragya Singh  
Roos van Kreij*

## **Editor**

*Natasha Barton*

## **Designer**

*Britt Duppen*

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youth  
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

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