

TNOYS BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

Youth engagement is a subset of the youth development approach, which acknowledges both youth as resources and that helping young people requires strengthening families and communities. According to the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, youth engagement has 3 main components:

- (1) Viewing young people and families as partners and involving them in program and service design and delivery
- (2) Giving youth access to services and programs that meet their needs
- (3) Offering youth opportunities to develop relationships with supportive adults

Youth engagement happens in youth-adult partnerships that are structured so that both groups contribute, teach, and learn from each other. To facilitate this, keep the following guidelines when working with youth:

- Be conscious of young people's schedules when planning meetings
- Be clear on roles & responsibilities for both youth and adults
- Involve young people from the very beginning to build ownership
- Think of and act as if young people are full, equal partners in the project
- Provide opportunities to foster mutual learning

MAKING YOUTH/ADULT PARTNERSHIPS WORK

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Adults assume that youth are not serious
- Both groups think what the other says is set in stone
- Adults make decisions for the good of the young people and youth make decisions without involving adults
- Either group assumes they have been left out of the loop
- Either group assumes the worst of the other
- Adults think they know what youth want & what is "best" for young people

SOLUTIONS

- **Listen:** Have real conversations without making assumptions
- **Question:** Ask open-ended questions to get more ideas. Be willing to ask for clarification.
- **Share:** Discuss how decisions will be made and who will have more weight in deciding; sometimes youth and sometimes adults
- **Talk:** Find ways to communicate and share aside from meetings
- **Trust:** Adults and youth must know that both groups have important things to contribute.
- **Involve:** Ask young people what is "best" for them. Youth are resources and partners in community development

BUILDING RAPPORT WITH YOUTH

No matter what the work looks like, building rapport with youth is essential for successful collaboration. Some basic principles to keep in mind when working with youth in different capacities are below.

One time occurrences: You will need to build rapport quickly so focus on the following:

- Be honest about expectations for the project (what you want the youth to contribute, and how you hope to benefit from youth participation).
- Listen and be engaged!
- Maintain eye contact the same way the responding youth does.
- Make sure you respect the young person's space: if they step back, you step back a bit as well.
- Use head nods to show agreement.
- Reflect back what they say to show you understand them.
- Ask the young person if they have any questions or want to be referred for any services
- Thank the youth for their help with the project.

Ongoing relationships: You will have more time with the youth, so your honesty, respect, and active listening explained above are important; continuing to show them their impact is key.

- Make sure youth will participate in meaningful ways. Young people should be involved in making decisions from the beginning to the end of a project or initiative.
- Let them know their involvement is important. Make sure to show the ways their position, their feedback, their voice is being heard.
- Schedule meetings when youth can attend and in a location accessible to them. Like everyone else, keep young people informed about plans and meeting times.
- Make the work interactive, fun, and valuable. Like adults, youth are more likely to get involved and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling. Offering food and drink is a great way to keep them involved.

Whether you are an adult participant, a youth committee member, youth co-worker, or a young person receiving services, the best practices of engaging people are the same!

- Respect everyone as a person of worth who has something to contribute.
- We are all doing the best we can with what we've got and all people have untapped resources.
- There's no such thing as failure; only feedback.