

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The **W**hat, the **W**hy, and the **H**ow



What is Youth Engagement?

“Empowering all young people as valuable partners in addressing and making decisions about issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe to be important.”

– *The New Mentality*

“The meaningful and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity focusing outside the self. Full engagement consists of a cognitive component, an affective component, and a behavioral component, also known as “Head, heart, and Feet” [and spirit].”

– *Center of Excellence for Youth Engagement*

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Why Is Youth Engagement (YE) Important?



Evidence shows that YE is beneficial for both youth and the services they use. [6, 10, 16]

YE leads to better health outcomes for young people, adults, agencies and communities. [4, 5]



YE builds resilience and amplifies protective factors among marginalized youth. [18]

YE can lead to increased social inclusion. YE is particularly effective in health promotion services. [2]



YE can help promote connectedness within a community, allow contextualization of experiences, and promote adherence to treatment. [3, 8, 12, 15, 17]

YE supports the development of marginalized youth when processes use diverse, critical resources to build their practice. [13, 14, 1]



YE increases an organization's ability to connect and respond to youth's needs, particularly diverse groups. [19, 1]

YE improves program effectiveness and increases organizational credibility. [20]



How do we implement it?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach or checklist to youth engagement. Meaningful youth engagement is a process and practice that is most successful when based in strong relationships and continuous learning, and integrated across an organization's culture, from the front lines of service to organizational leadership teams. *Hart's Ladder* is a way to depict the best practices and things to avoid.^[10] Below is an adapted version of the model, as while they are ordered (i.e. partnership is the best) all 5 practices can be effective when meaningful and authentic.

HART'S LADDER OF (YOUTH) PARTICIPATION

Partnership (Ideal)

Relationship of shared decision-making and equal power between youth and adults to achieve common goals

Assigned but informed

Youth are assigned specific tasks with limited decision-making power, but are informed of the parameters of their engagement and extent of their influence.

Youth-Initiated

Relationship where young people are engaged in a project, and bring in adult allies, on their terms, to support the initiative on the terms of the youth.

MEANINGFUL
ENGAGEMENT

Consulted and informed

Youth are informed about a project, the context of their engagement, and solicited to provide advice and ideas.

Adult-Initiated

Relationship where young people are engaged in a project initiated by adult allies, where the young people are engaged on the terms of the adults.

WHAT TO AVOID

1. Tokenism

takes place when young people are engaged with little actual power, or when young people are engaged in order to check a box.

2. Manipulation

takes place when young people are engaged on false terms, where young people are misled – intentionally or not – on the scope of the project, their role, or their decision-making authority.

3. Decoration

takes place when young people are engaged only for their presence to augment an event or initiative, where their engagement has no more depth than their physical presence.

Want More Information?



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