



# New Generation Initiative

## Community Engagement Guide

### **1** Getting started in youth and young adult engagement

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The New Generation Initiative's Community Engagement Guide is a series of six training manuals produced by the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center in partnership with content specialists in the field of youth and young adult community engagement. These manuals are designed for use by participants in the New Generation Communities training programs. Permission is required from the Rural Center communications office to reproduce or distribute the manual for other purposes.



# The New Generation Initiative

North Carolina  
Rural Economic  
Development  
Center

We know that successful rural communities must have a population of young people engaged in decision-making and actively working to grow their local economies. Yet each year, hundreds of young people move away to attend college, join the military or take a job – and never return to become part of the economic and social life of their hometowns. Many who stay feel disconnected from the mainstream of decision-making and activity.

During 2010-11, the Rural Center took several steps toward understanding the aspirations of rural youth and their perspectives on their communities. We coupled these with an examination of statistical data regarding the well-being of children, youth and youth adults in rural North Carolina. “Young and Rural: A Snapshot of Rural North Carolina’s New Generation” summarizes the findings.

Building on this research, the 2011 Rural Partners Forum engaged over 650 people in exploring what it means to be young and rural in 2011. The forum culminated with the announcement of the three-year New Generation Initiative.

## The Initiative

The North Carolina New Generation Initiative helps rural communities transform themselves by fully embracing the promise represented by their young people. It provides \$3.6 million in resources to engage rural youth and young adults in the life of their communities and foster the next generation of rural business owners, skilled workers and economic and community leaders. It is supported by public and private partners and led by the Rural Center.

The initiative is established on the belief that:

- Young people will generate opportunities for themselves and others if given the chance
- Committed, caring community mentors for these young people will enhance their likelihood of success
- Young people who are engaged in their communities are more likely to stay or return after college or other life experiences to live, work and raise their families.

North Carolina New Generation Advisory Council advises the center on implementation of the initiative, joins with other leading programs to explore opportunities to increase youth involvement in community life and will develop a New Generation Action Plan to respond to the challenges facing youth and young adults in rural communities. Leading the council are Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton, chair, and N.C. Rep. Carolyn Justice, vice chair.

With four distinct programs, the initiative works simultaneously to create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, build leaders and strengthen communities.

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## Ventures

New Generation Ventures makes self-employment an attractive and attainable career option for rural young adults, ages 18 to 30. The program is open to young people who commit to launch their business in one of North Carolina's 85 rural counties. Ventures supports young entrepreneurs with business counseling, scholarships for business training, networking opportunities and access to new forms of capital. Visit the Rural Center website <http://ncruralcenter.org> to learn how to apply.

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## Careers

New Generation Careers gives rural communities the opportunity to design workforce strategies that cultivate their pool of young talent, while connecting young people to new jobs. It provides grants of up to \$100,000 to assist communities that offer employer-driven training and other workforce services that result in jobs for young adults, ages 18 to 30. The deadline for applications has passed.

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## Leaders

New Generation Leaders encourages teams of young people to tackle community improvement projects of their own creation. Aided by grants, young people ages 16 to 30 work with established leadership to design and implement a project, immersing themselves in the community's history, culture and economy. Ten grants of \$20,000 will be awarded annually for three years. The deadline for 2013 applications is April 17, 2013. Visit the Rural Center website to download the application.



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## Communities

New Generation Communities offers high-quality resources and training opportunities for people of all ages who seek to more fully engage youth and young adults in economic and community life. Participants receive training on such topics as fostering entrepreneurship and creating a welcoming community. In addition, the Youth Engagement Resource Guide provides information on state and national programs that can aid these efforts. It is available in print format and is incorporated into the online Rural Resource Guide. To learn more, visit the Rural Center website.

### Workshops to be offered as part of the series:

**November 2012:** Getting started in youth and young adult engagement

**February 2013:** Fostering the growth of entrepreneurship among youth and young adults

**May 2013:** Involving youth and young adults in local governance and community leadership

**August 2013:** Building a brighter future for high-risk youth

**November 2013:** Creating technology-ready communities

**February 2014:** Passing the torch to young farmers, business owners and civic and community leaders/Encouraging young people to come back, give back

Each training program will feature expert presentations, interactive sessions and easy-to-follow guides that contain community-based strategies and resources. Workshops will be held in Raleigh and across the state. Webcasts will also be available.

Details on each training session will be posted on the Rural Center website and announced through email alerts.

## A Word About This Workbook

Participants in each training session will receive a workbook to support their youth and young adult engagement activities in their home communities. This workbook is the first of six.

As you use the workbook, please keep in mind that the New Generation Initiative focuses on young people ages 16 to 30. To the extent possible, we refer to this group in the text as “young people” or “youth and young adults.” Sometimes, for simplicity, we use the word “youth” to encompass both. Likewise, we use “adults” and “older adults” to refer to those individuals in the community who are over 30, are already engaged in the community and are taking leadership roles in the engagement of youth and young adults.

# Eight Steps

## To Engage Young People In North Carolina's Rural Communities

- 1 Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement
- 2 Stages of Youth Engagement
- 3 Who to Involve in Youth Engagement
- 4 When and How to Engage Youth
- 5 Barriers to Authentic Youth Engagement
- 6 Making Authentic Youth Engagement Sustainable
- 7 Assessing Youth Engagement
- 8 Resources for Youth Engagement

# Introduction

“ I care about this right now. Why should I wait to do something? ”

“ I can't ignore the challenges my family faces anymore. ”

“ This affects our entire community and our entire community needs to take action. ”

These could be the voices of wise elders, speaking strongly about issues that matter. They could be the voices of parents, concerned about their children. Instead, they are comments from young people, speaking with the passion and wisdom that comes from their own perspectives and their own experience.

The good news is that teenagers and young adults in North Carolina and across the globe are beginning to work with older citizens to create positive, effective and sustainable change. They are becoming involved in their communities – reflecting on issues, planning for action, making decisions and advocating for progress. They are addressing matters that are important to them, their loved ones and neighbors, major issues that include economic development and building more vibrant communities.

So, how do we build on this exciting movement? How do we tap into rural North Carolina's greatest resource: the talents and energies of young people, our next generation of leaders? By welcoming them as vital community members now! They can contribute to improving our communities, hone their skills and interests, and embark on a lifetime journey of community participation.

In this workbook, we focus on something we call Authentic Youth Engagement – the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in activities focused on community improvement and managing change in our ever-evolving world. (This workbook defines young people as including teenagers and young adults, up to and including age 30. Persons over 30 generally will be referred to as older adults.)

When Authentic Youth Engagement is achieved, youth and young adults interact as full partners with older members of a program or organization, making important contributions for the good of the community as a whole. Individual self-interest takes a back seat as the power of the group to effect positive change is realized.

Authentic Youth Engagement is an ongoing process. There are always fresh faces and voices in our communities, just as older citizens eventually step back from community involvement and pass on. Understanding the elements of Authentic Youth Engagement for the long term can transform organizations, rural communities and, ultimately, all of North Carolina.



# Step One

## Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement

According to a study conducted in 2010 by the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, 80 percent of North Carolina's young people would like to volunteer in their communities. Most of them, however, had not been asked to be involved and simply didn't know how to get started.

Some community organizations and institutions may not have mechanisms in place to welcome young people into their ranks and to encourage and nurture them once they are there. Other groups may operate with the notion that young people are too different or too unstructured to be included. Organizations that fail to reach out to youth and young adults limit their effectiveness and may jeopardize their futures.

These simple tips can help any organization ensure that young people are being involved in a meaningful way.

***Remember that young people are engaged already.*** Older adults who want to engage youth and younger adults in community development and civic activities must remember that young people already are doing other things. To win younger people over, they must see value in this new engagement opportunity and perhaps disengage from something else.

***See your program as a door opening to broader community engagement by young people.*** If your program can provide younger citizens with avenues to participate in public decision-making, public service, cultural expression and community service, the experience likely will encourage them to seek more opportunities. View your program as "priming the pump" for lifelong civic engagement.

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***You can't fool the youth.*** The old saying, "You can't fool all the people all the time" applies to young people, too. Using youth engagement as a "rubber stamp" or as a "decoration" for adult actions is not acceptable to many young people and adults. Youth engagement activities should always avoid manipulating or tokenizing young people. Engage as many young people as possible in as many functions as possible, and in meaningful ways. Trust that young people can share leadership responsibilities with older adults, often resulting in outstanding outcomes.

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***Work with young people – not for young people.*** Work to be an active, engaged ally to young people every time you can – not just when it is convenient. Provide training and coaching throughout every activity to engage, encourage and empower young people. This will enable them to become purposeful, effective leaders who can then pass these skills on to others. Community leaders must continually be nurtured, groomed and readied to take on new challenges throughout life.

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***Make having fun powerful.*** The days of "pizza box youth engagement" are over. You can't just throw a bunch of "fun food" into a room and expect young people to come and learn something meaningful. If the goal is recreation, then have young people plan the activity, lead it and reflect on it afterwards. But why offer just recreation? Expand the group's possibilities and horizons. Any meaningful group effort can combine fun with learning and meeting goals.

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***Have real choices and options.*** Not all young people have the same interests or the same skill sets. Some youth and young adults love the idea of rallying other people and might have experience in doing so. Other youth are skilled at Internet communication or research. Still others see themselves as future community leaders, politicians or lawyers. They want to get involved in organizational governance. By providing options for authentic engagement, your organization can better recruit youth, get them involved and sustain their engagement. Seek to match their interests, experiences and skills with the organization's genuine needs.

# 1

## Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement

**Be clear.** Being absolutely clear about the structure and roles young people fill is necessary for the transition from their being recipients of services to their becoming partners. Clear roles help programs, organizations and communities become more effective because everyone knows what is expected. Clarity reduces confusion and lets everyone manage his or her limited time more effectively.

**Foster mutual accountability.** Older adults typically think of themselves in roles such as teacher, mentor, or manager. They see young people as novices. Successful youth engagement emphasizes shared teaching and learning, collective leadership and mutual accountability. Age is not the determining factor for responsibility. Instead, young people can hold older people accountable as well as vice versa. By fostering mutual accountability, organizations can ensure that youth and young adults become successfully engaged in action.

**Be deliberate.** Youth engagement will not automatically transform your organization and community. Organizations must commit to engaging youth and young adults, be strategic about implementation, and invent and reinvent for themselves how to make youth engagement succeed.

**Don't talk about "youth problems" anymore.** Young people are part of larger communities, and when they have a problem, their communities have a problem. Labeling problems as being confined to young people is counterproductive and inaccurate. Community problems should be addressed by communities, not foisted on the shoulders young people. Encourage young people to critically reflect on their experiences throughout their community. They may find that others share their issues. By examining media, attitudes and the structures around them, young people can connect with broader issues facing their communities.

**Acknowledge young people in significant ways.** Patting someone on the back or presenting a certificate can only go so far in terms of a reward. Despite older adults' outward expressions of support, young people sometimes have very little actual support from adults. There are many ways to show authentic commitment to youth engagement. A school might give students credit for participating in youth engagement activities; organizations might provide all youth a cash stipend; individual adult allies may give young people letters of support, encouragement and acknowledgement as they move forward in life. Those are all tangible ways to show real dedication to engaging young people.

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***Engage young people in something greater than themselves.*** The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that living nonviolence requires everyone to “rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” When applied to youth engagement, this means that simply encouraging or allowing young people to advocate for themselves is not enough. Responsible adults committed to Authentic Youth Engagement must seek to engage young people in issues affecting others in the community. This allows young people to see more than their own self-interest and to become whole-community members. Make community mapping, outside speakers and community field trips a part of your program. Help young people identify allies throughout all aspects of the community, not just those with which they are most familiar.

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***Engage every young person throughout your community in as many ways as possible.*** Nothing should be seen as a barrier to youth engagement. Educational attainment, age, socio-economic status, racial and cultural backgrounds are elements to build upon and learn from. Authentic Youth Engagement opens doors for all young people to become motivated allies and partners.

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***Teach every adult in a young person’s life that they’re responsible for working to engage young people throughout their communities.*** Only through the constant encouragement and focus of parents, teachers, youth workers, principals, religious leaders, counselors and other supportive adults will young people feel there is a real investment in their lives that extends beyond their own interests. Every young person should feel that community improvement is his or her personal responsibility; likewise, every adult should feel the same about youth engagement.

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***Teach young people about engagement and they’ll think for an hour; actively engage them as partners and they will become engaged for a lifetime.*** Civic engagement can be one of the most fulfilling and personally rewarding endeavors an individual undertakes. By fostering involvement in civic affairs and practicing Authentic Youth Engagement with young people, older adults can set in motion a lifetime of meaningful community service.

# 1

## Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement

*Recognize that youth engagement is never done.* Will Rogers once said, “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you don’t move.” We live in a world that constantly changes, and each generation of young people will be different from the next. Youth engagement initiatives must change as well. Older adults who practice youth engagement techniques that worked a decade ago may find them less effective today. Keep learning from today’s youth so that they can become partners in improving today’s communities.

## The Way Youth Engagement Happens

Achieving authentic engagement requires a process of interaction and communication. We call these steps the Cycle of Youth Engagement. Youth engagement is more than simply hearing, checking in or talking with young people. Youth engagement requires focused two-way communication that reaches deep.

### Listen to Young People

It is one thing to hear someone; it is another to truly listen, understand and connect.

Strive to give young people the time to be heard and the space (a safe place) to be heard. And remember that not all listening involves oral communication. The digital age presents many new opportunities for older adults to interact with young people and listen to their concerns and ideas.

### Validate Young People

Providing positive feedback to young people is an expression of genuine interest and recognizes the value of the young person and the individual’s thoughts and ideas. Validation can provide rich rewards for young people who often do not feel acknowledged by older adults. Sometimes validation is best achieved by asking a series of gentle, interested questions that strip away layers and get to the real issue.

# The Cycle of Youth Engagement



# 1

## Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement

### Authorize Young People

Authorizing young people means giving them the room to say what they will and how they will. Two of the ways that older adults can authorize youth and young adults are by:

- Positioning young people to be able to share their ideas, actions, perspectives, knowledge and abilities. This could be as low-key as creating ground rules that acknowledge the needs of youth, such as getting up to stretch their legs when they need to or calling for a “fun break” when they need one. It could be as grandiose as designating half the positions on a nonprofit board of directors as full-voting youth members. Both of these actions authorize young people and foster youth engagement.
- Learning about the things that matter to young people is a powerful form of authorization. This can be a challenge for older adults, but once they cross that hurdle of interest, they are poised to enable youth and young adults to learn eagerly about the topics that matter to them.

### Take Action With Young People

Young people thrive on action. When Gandhi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” he was calling on anyone who is committed to take action to make the world a better place. Action must focus on immediate issues such as organizational funding and program design or on broader community issues such as literacy, access to health care or recreational opportunities.

### Reflect With Young People

When youth and young adults engage in roles normally reserved for older adults, new opportunities for learning, analysis and critical thinking emerge. Putting our experiences into words and sharing them with one another is called reflection; this skill is an intentional process and is necessary to become a well-rounded, engaged adult. Reflection is storytelling, which is common to all cultures. Encouraging young people to relate their experiences engages them by helping them to find meaning and place value on those experiences. Reflection is best done as a shared activity and while the experience is still fresh.

## Facilitation Tips

Youth engagement activities must be facilitated intentionally. Here are some tips for successful facilitation:

- **Be a facilitator.** Be a facilitator, not a teacher, speaker or preacher. Albert Einstein wrote, “I do not teach anyone. I only provide the environment in which they can learn.” When engaging young people, a facilitator leads the gathering or group; guides the gathering towards its goals; and leads by example, not force.
- **Create guidelines and goals.** Invite young people to create ground rules or guidelines at the outset. Brainstorm potential rules and write them down, but avoid having too many. Every group should have some specific guidelines that all participants—young and older—agree on.
- **Reflect, reflect, reflect.** One way to make youth engagement activities matter is to reflect before, during and after the activities. Continuously make opportunities for individuals to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Create safe space.** Create safe spaces where young people and older adults can learn together. Safe places adhere to guidelines and ground rules, which should address respect for one another’s opinions.
- **Seek consensus.** Facilitators often use consensus for group decisions. Consensus is not voting; rather, consensus seeks a path for moving forward without breaking the group into “winners” and “losers.” Consensus keeps groups united.
- **Embrace the journey.** Engagement is a process, not an outcome. Encourage all participants, younger and older, to view the engagement process as a journey. The educational leader John Dewey wrote that “the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing (and) refining is the aim of living.” This is true of excellent youth engagement facilitation.
- **Embrace challenges.** Group work invariably encounters difficult times. One of the keys to excellent facilitation is knowing that criticism and failure will come. We always have plenty of opportunities to learn through our experiences, and failure can be one of them.

# 1

## Fundamentals of Authentic Youth Engagement

### New Roles for Young People

Traditional youth development programs put young people into the roles of recipients. They received information delivered by older adults and “experts.” This method, however, did not employ the most valuable of all learning tools, which is experience.

When young people, under the guidance of skilled facilitators, undertake meaningful activities, they become empowered to learn through experience. This process creates an environment where they come to understand that their ideas, opinions and actions have value.

We now know that young people can take on many different types of roles as they become engaged in their communities. These roles include:

- **Facilitators.** Knowledge comes from study, experience and reflection. Engaging young people as facilitators helps reinforce their commitment to learning and the subject they are sharing.
- **Researchers.** Identifying issues, surveying interests, analyzing findings and developing projects in response are powerful avenues for youth engagement.
- **Planners.** Planning includes program design, event planning, curriculum development and staffing.
- **Organizers.** Community organizing happens when leaders bring together everyone in a community to address common problems. Youth community organizers can rally their peers, families and community members for action.
- **Decision-makers.** Young people can serve on committees, boards and in other capacities where they can help make community decisions.
- **Advocates.** When young people stand for their beliefs and understand the impact of their voices, they can represent their families and communities with pride, courage and ability.
- **Evaluators.** Young people can assess and evaluate the effects of programs, classes, activities and projects. Their opinions are important, and their experiences are valid indicators of success.
- **Specialists.** There are topics where young people know more than older adults. Consider computers and the Internet, for example. When young people are the experts, allow these specialists to share their knowledge and enrich everyone’s ability to be more effective.

Facilitators for youth engagement look for ways to expand learning, leadership and service opportunities for young people. They know that young people, with guidance and support, can step up to almost any challenge and surprise everyone with their creative energy.

## STEP ONE: Key Questions: Fundamentals of Youth Engagement

- What specific duties/tasks/assignments will young people have?
- How will older adults be involved?
- How does youth engagement relate to the community at large?
- How does youth engagement relate to formal organization or community activities?

# 2

## Step Two

### Stages of Youth Engagement

#### How Do You SEE Young People?

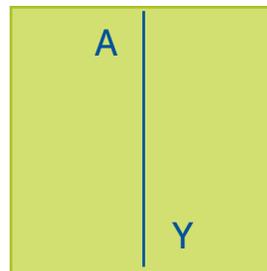
Successful youth engagement depends on developing mature, respectful relationships between the generations. This model illustrates a continuum of adult perspectives of young people, leading to the ideal (solidarity).

#### Adult Perspectives of Young People

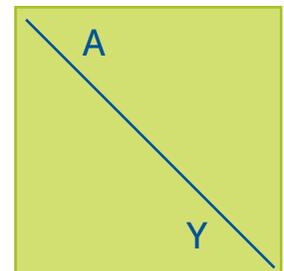
(A=adults; Y=young people)



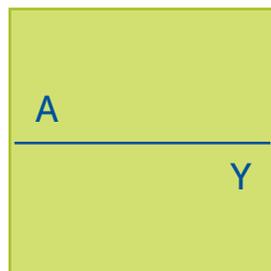
Apathy



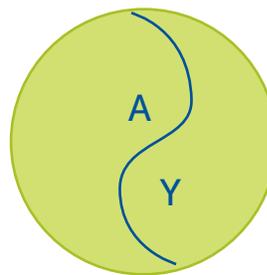
Pity



Sympathy



Empathy



Solidarity

**Apathy.** Apathy occurs when individuals or groups are indifferent towards youth and young adults. Apathy is obvious when an organization involved in civic life or community development doesn't have outreach specifically for youth and young adults.

**Pity.** This perspective represents a completely top-down perspective by older adults toward youth and young adults. Pity takes away the ability of young people to change their communities by erasing their self-esteem and their sense of urgency and purpose. Pity is apparent when programs present activities to youth and young adults with no consideration of whether they want or need those activities or whether they could provide them for themselves.

**Sympathy.** Sympathy is apparent when adults give young people what they apparently cannot acquire for themselves. These may be physical things, time or money, offered from a position of compassion. Sympathetic actions may make older adults feel better about themselves, but the process disengages young people from actively creating knowledge or resources. Sympathy is another top-down perspective, positioning adults to give without acknowledging the receipt of anything in return.

**Empathy.** Reciprocity is at the core of an empathetic perspective of young people, which allows adults to see young people in a more equitable way. Each person acknowledges the other as a partner, and each is invested in the outcomes of the others' perspective.

**Solidarity.** Solidarity allows for complete equity, fully recognizing the benefits and challenges in relationships between older adults and young people. Possibilities abound.

Older adults can use this model to critically and creatively reflect on their attitudes, behaviors and perspectives toward young people. As individuals and groups develop the skills and attitudes to achieve solidarity with young people, their efforts and programs will become more successful.

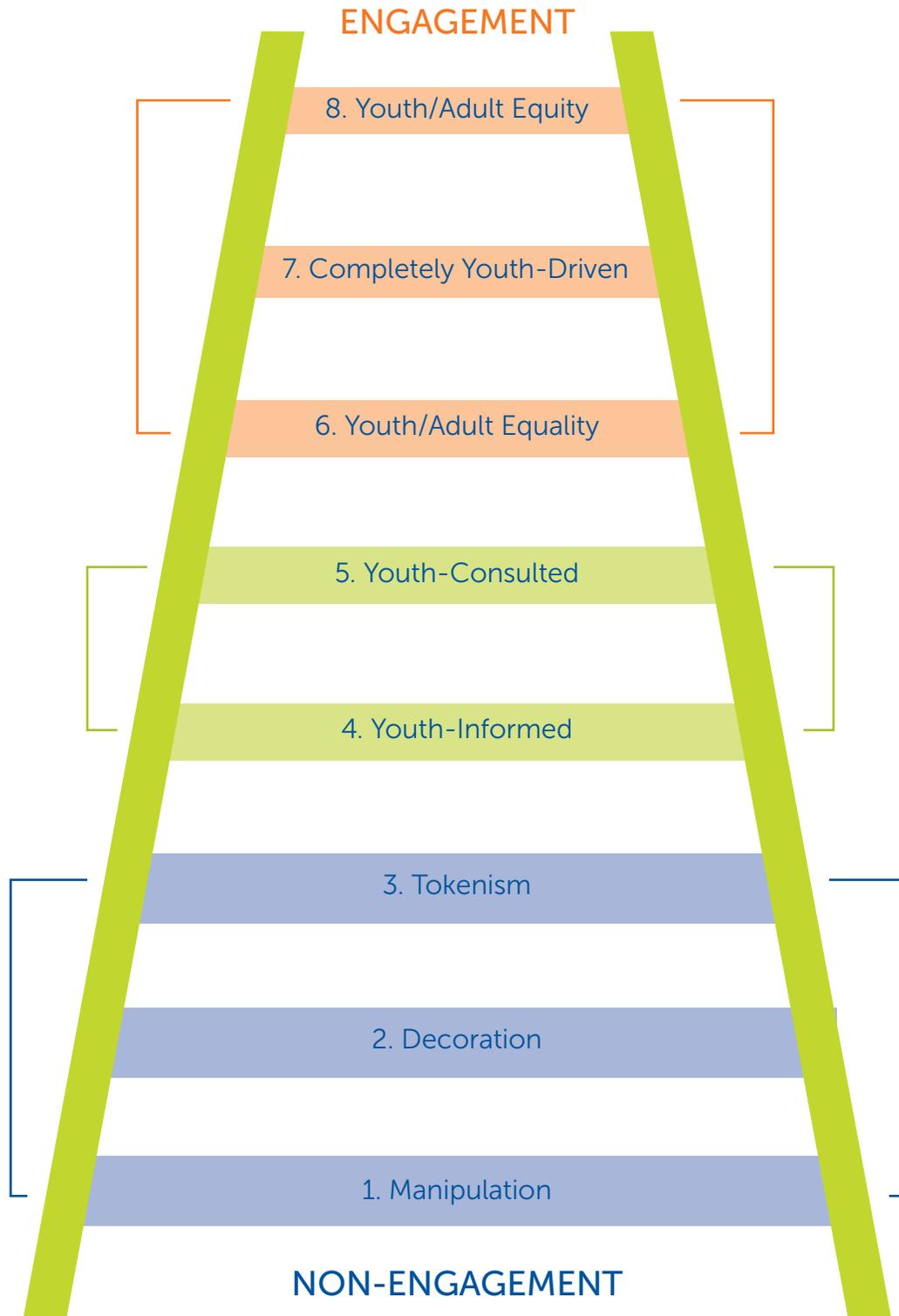
## What Do You Expect of Young People?

American culture traditionally provided few community-wide options of leadership, authority and responsibility for young people. Those that existed were relegated to youth-only organizations. But this situation is changing. In organizations and communities across North Carolina, youth and young adults are serving as decision-makers, planners, researchers, advocates and more.

The Ladder of Youth Engagement encourages adults and young people to examine why and how young people participate in their communities.

# Ladder of Youth Engagement

Adapted by Adam Fletcher (2011) from work by Roger Hart, et al (1994)



The following rubric breaks down what can be expected at the various stages of the Ladder of Youth Engagement.

	THE WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED	CHALLENGE	REWARD
ENGAGEMENT	8. Youth/Adult Equity. All youth, young adults and older adults are recognized for their impact and ownership of the outcomes.	This is an exceptional relationship in communities that requires conscious commitment by all participants. Deliberately addresses barriers and constantly ensures shared outcomes.	Creates structures that establish and support safe, supportive, effective and sustainable environments for engagement, and ultimately recreates the climate and culture of organizations and communities.
	7. Completely Youth-Driven Action. These activities do not include adults in positions of authority; rather, adults are there in secondary roles to support young people.	Young people may operate in a vacuum, often without the recognition of their impact on the larger community. Activities driven by youth and young adults may not be seen by older adults with deserved validity.	Developing complete ownership in communities allows young people to effectively drive community engagement. Young people experience the outcomes of their direct actions on themselves, their peers and the larger community.
	6. Youth/Adult Equality. This is a 50/50 split of responsibilities, authority, obligation and commitment.	There isn't recognition for the specific developmental needs or representation opportunities for young people. Without receiving that recognition, young people may lose interest and become disengaged.	Young people can substantially transform adults' opinions, ideas and actions.
PARTIAL ENGAGEMENT	5. Youth-Consulted. Adults actively consult young people while they're involved.	Young people have only the authority that older adults grant them, and their engagement is subject to external approval.	Young people can substantially transform adults' opinions, ideas and actions.
	4. Youth-Informed. Young people inform adults.	Adults do not have to let young people impact their decisions.	Young people <i>may</i> influence adult-driven decisions or activities.
NON-ENGAGEMENT	3. Tokenism. Adults assign young people only token roles.	Youth and young adults are used inconsequentially by adults to reinforce the perception that young people are engaged.	Validates youth and young adults attending events without requiring effort beyond that.
	2. Decoration. Adults use young people to decorate their activities.	The presence of young people is treated as all that is necessary without reinforcing active engagement.	Attendance by youth and young adults is a tangible outcome that may demonstrate consideration for engaging young people.
	1. Manipulation. Adults manipulate young people.	Young people are forced to attend without regard to their interest.	Adults experience involving young people and gain rationale for continuing activities.

# 2

## Stages of Youth Engagement

### Name Your Motives

Without the commitment of many older adults, youth engagement will not be effective, meaningful or sustainable. It will not become widespread throughout our communities. Motivations affect the way we perceive young people, and the way we perceive young people drives the ways we interact with them. Our interactions with youth and young adults determine whether they're engaged in our programs or communities.

Personal motivations and organizational motivations are the most important factors affecting youth engagement.

### Motivational Assessment

Following is a tool that you can use to assess your personal and organizational motives for youth engagement.

	Disagree	Maybe	Agree
<b>How much do you agree or disagree?</b>			
1. I think youth engagement is important to my organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I want youth engagement to be important to our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My organization has made a serious commitment to youth engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Every single adult in my organization is committed to youth engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. My organization wants to affect the engagement of every youth and young adult in our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I am confident I can engage young people successfully.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I believe young people have a right to be engaged in our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Young people engage better with their peers than adults.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I think positively about youth engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I know youth and young adults who care about our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. My organization has challenging goals for youth engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Young people can trust me to take them seriously.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I personally encourage young people to get involved in community activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Disagree	Maybe	Agree
14. I clearly understand what is involved in the process, how long it will take to accomplish and how it aligns with what is most important to our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Young people understand how community government works.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I know youth who want to work in our community when they are adults.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. I believe young people can positively change communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. I know adults beyond my organization who want to engage youth and young adults.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. I believe young people are important to our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. I know why my organization is focusing on youth engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Add the checks in each column & write the number here:			
Multiply number in row 21 by this number:	X1	X3	X5
Totals:			
Add together all three scores and write your grand total here:			

## Score Interpretation:

**61—100** You and your organization are well motivated to engage young people. Your organization makes a conscious effort to stay focused on youth engagement and has spent significant time and effort on setting goals. You inspire others with your perseverance, self-discipline and great results with youth engagement. Be aware that not everyone is as motivated as you or your organization, and you may need to exercise patience and understanding with others.

**21—60** You're doing fairly well with your motivation for youth engagement but could be achieving greater results. Redouble efforts to be inclusive and treat young people as full partners in projects. A detailed action plan can help.

**1—20** Personal doubts and/or fears about youth and young adults may keep you from succeeding at times. You may not have confidence in your own skills, abilities and talents related to youth engagement. Your organization may be disconnected from young people and needs your leadership. Start by setting small, attainable goals. Work from there to build a strong, positive support system to help the organization stay focused on engaging young people.

## STEP TWO: Key Questions: Stages of Youth Engagement

- Have adults identified why they want to meaningfully involve young people?  
Why or why not?
- Are young people interested in being involved with your organization?  
Why or why not?
- Is youth engagement seen as a learning tool? Is it being used as a pathway for young people to successfully meet their goals in life?

# 3

## Step Three

### Who to Involve in Youth Engagement

An organization that commits to engaging young people must not reach out to a select few. The door must be open to engage all young people. This includes those who may be high school dropouts as well as the valedictorian. It means including disabled youth as well as cheerleaders and athletes. It means youth of all colors and cultural backgrounds.

Some youth engagement functions will be convenient. In other words, the process will be within the comfort range of older adults. Some youth engagement functions will be inconvenient and stretch the comfort boundaries of the older generation. Inconvenient youth engagement may be necessary, however, to build a youth engagement program that truly reflects the community.

#### A Different Way to Think About Diversity

Older North Carolinians successfully working with young people to build communities have learned that young people can be effective self-advocates and peer teachers, community culture monitors, and organizational cheerleaders. By partnering with young adults and modeling shared leadership techniques, older adults are helping young people to challenge themselves and work across communities for the betterment of all.

Yet many communities still struggle to effectively work with the full spectrum of their young people.

## Convenient and Inconvenient Youth Engagement

Many well-meaning adults who advocate for youth engagement too often consider only those elements of the younger population with which they are familiar. This is comfortable and convenient for the older person, but it doesn't fully address realities regarding young people in the community.

Identifying aspects of youth engagement as convenient or inconvenient doesn't convey a value judgment; it simply acknowledges an existing condition.

Convenient Youth Engagement happens whenever adults know who is going to be engaged, what is going to happen, where and when it will happen, and what the outcomes will be. Adults might not have written the whole script for youth engagement, but what's going to be said is no surprise to them.

Inconvenient Youth Engagement takes place when young people become engaged in ways that aren't predictable. They share ideas, shout out thoughts, take action or critique harshly. They do things that adults don't know, understand, approve of or otherwise predict.

The difference between these two situations depends on context, including location, position and circumstance. A young person's race, socio-economic status, gender, educational attainment or other characteristics frequently determines how engagement is perceived. A particular instance of youth engagement may be heard or ignored, approved or disapproved, praised or penalized by older adults.

## Toward Inclusive, Diverse Youth Engagement

Most people, regardless of age, value action. People who take action, who can rally others toward a goal and who may be forceful or eloquent, assume or are provided a position at the head of the group. That is a traditional form of leadership, and many organizations perpetuate this practice.

All too often, organizations find it comfortable when reaching out to young people to invite only those who look and act like younger versions of themselves. This carries on the notion that youth inclusion and leadership is only for certain types of individuals.

Well-meaning adults often will try to engage young people of different backgrounds, economic situations or races in their organizations. When they attempt

# 3

## Who to Involve in Youth Engagement

this without considering in advance how to interact with and respect persons of a different heritage and background, inconvenient situations may arise.

When youth engagement has inconvenient aspects, older adults must model patience and understanding. They need to strive for the latitude to allow young people different from themselves to express ideas and concerns and then direct their energies toward the group's goals and community betterment.

### Recruitment

We live in a diverse world, and North Carolina's communities reflect that diversity more and more. Older adults pursuing youth engagement should keep in mind that diversity goes far beyond skin color. In addition to race, diversity includes gender, socio-economic status, nationality, ethnic group, abilities and disabilities, religion and geographic region.

An organization that nurtures a safe, respectful environment will have more success in recruiting and engaging young people from throughout the community.

Keep in mind that one person cannot represent the many. A single young person should not be considered "the youth voice" at the table. Nor should a single person of color or a lone female be expected to represent an ethnicity or an entire gender.

Honor balance in age, experience, cultural background, education and training.

### Advantages of Recruiting Diverse Young People

- ***New personal linkages.*** People of all ages learn they have common goals and can share common activities within their communities.
- ***Tighter communities.*** Newly engaged young people can build bridges and tear down boundaries of age, race and culture, making for stronger communities.
- ***Strong outcomes.*** Research shows risky behavior declines and social fragmentation lessens when group makeup reflects community diversity.
- ***Stronger identities.*** Youth engagement that respects and celebrates our differences reinforces ethnic and cultural identities while building stronger communities.

## Recruitment Tips

These suggestions come from Native American and African American rural youth involved in youth engagement programs.

- ***Please treat me with respect.*** Talk to youth like we're on the same level, rather than top-down.
- ***Be truly supportive.*** We like positive feedback and encouragement. It's important to find a balance between offering both positive and constructive feedback.
- ***Be consistent.*** Activities should be scheduled consistently. Irregular functions lead to suspicion and make it hard to trust older adults. Don't break promises and let us down.
- ***Make space.*** Make a specific place for us in the community newsletter, and put a "Youth Section" on the bulletin boards around town. Allow us to share and learn about upcoming activities, workshops and events.
- ***Make room.*** Treat us as active, equal members of our community.

## Actions to Embrace Diversity

The following exercises can help an organization achieve diversity in youth engagement that better reflects the entire community.

- ***What do adults feel and think about young people?*** Assess adult attitudes and beliefs about sharing power with young people. Include staff, volunteers, executive leaders and board directors. Create a safe space for them to share and address hopes as well as concerns in a respectful manner.
- ***What do young people feel and think about adults?*** In a safe space, bring together a cross-section of young people to learn their attitudes about being engaged.
- ***When can we talk?*** Create opportunities for young people and adults to share lessons learned and address concerns about fostering youth engagement.
- ***How far can we bend?*** Be flexible. There is no one-size-fits-all way for youth engagement. If one avenue doesn't work, try another method to find one that meets your community's needs.
- ***Are you sincere?*** Avoid tokenism by making the experience meaningful and being clear about why each person is involved.

- *Can we learn from each other?* Identify ways to make training and mentoring more relevant to youth of different backgrounds, cultures and experiences. Provide mentors who represent their cultural identities.
- *Why should I?* Incentives for youth engagement should consider the cultures of all young people represented. As with mentors, look for learning opportunities and partners who share cultural backgrounds with all youth involved.

### STEP THREE: Key Questions: Who to Engage

- Do the young people being recruited represent the entire community, culturally, economically, etc.?
- Do the group's activities have elements to appeal to everyone?
- How will the involvement of a diverse range of young people be sustained?



## 4

## Step Four

### When and How to Engage Youth

Time and timing affect youth engagement programs and efforts. Young people have a different understanding of time than do older adults. Allowing youth engagement to inform and drive yearly planning shows a consideration for the priorities of their lives. Including young people on a collaborative basis gives them purpose, position and appropriate power in communities.

“It takes a child to raise a village” is a modern parable of the youth engagement movement. Examining the manner in which time affects youth and young adults shows how.

## Times of Life

Youth engagement outside of one's immediate family begins as soon as a child interacts with other adults. This may happen at church or in a child-care environment. It certainly happens when a child enters pre-school, kindergarten and elementary school.

Youth engagement occurs whenever we invest interest, time, resources and space to help children and young adults develop their talents and skills. By engaging with a young person as an individual, we acknowledge his or her self-worth. Treating a young person as an individual means communicating with them, not talking down or at them. A child begins to form a sense of identity and purpose as a member of the larger community based on these important interactions with adults.

When a child feels a part of the community, he can draw upon the community for strength and guidance when facing hard times. Young people who feel strongly attached to their communities feel empowered to improve their lives; they also are more likely to want to give back and help build up that community.

Youth engagement continues during teen years. Home, school, community centers, town hall, parks and libraries all offer opportunities for youth engagement. Older adults who manage, lead and direct those places and institutions have an obligation to work for complete youth engagement throughout our communities. As teens are immersed in this expectation, they will develop, sustain and expand their comprehensive connections to their communities.

Youth engagement continues during young adulthood, when the forces of work, college and social life pull at the desire to be involved in one's community. As a consequence, many young adults actually disengage at this time of life. It is essential, therefore, to develop and maintain partnering relationships with young adults as they move along this transition. Older adults need to encourage young adults to stay connected with their communities through concrete action and involvement.

## The Challenges of Time

There are many challenges, barriers, and pitfalls to consider while planning how much time to commit to engaging young people.

***Challenge No. 1: The Band-Aid Syndrome.*** Adults may be tempted to see youth engagement as a bandage, a temporary fix for serious problems. While it is true that organizations and communities have short-term problems, it is also true that these problems are almost always a part of larger issues. Successful communities engage young people as part of a long-range effort for sustained community improvement. How much time an organization commits to engaging young

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## When and How to Engage Youth

people can serve as a litmus test for sincerity regarding youth engagement in a community. Short-lived bandages are not an indicator of commitment or sustainability.

**Challenge No. 2: Election Season Tokenism.** Election season may spawn a sudden interest in the “youth vote” and “youth issues.” Young people quickly identify these efforts as election season ploys. To avoid this tokenism, office holders and seekers should work to engage youth on a continual basis.

**Challenge No. 3: Quantity or Quality?** Many organizations use “quality management” theories to develop “client-driven” approaches to reform. These practices encourage them to look to youth to identify problems and solutions, which too often tend to be temporary and not sustainable. Young people need consistent, meaningful action. Successful youth engagement requires regular activities that go beyond quick fixes and provide constant feedback and action.

**Challenge No. 4: Seasons of Free Labor.** Youth engagement frequently is used as code language to disguise trash pick-up or graffiti removal programs. The assumption is that by being involved in community service activities, youth will become invested in their communities. Young people can generally see through the false advertising and often react to this deception adversely. A participant in a recent youth engagement workshop said, “Adults think that just because we’re kids, we are the ones polluting and trashing places. But we’re not.” Efforts to land free labor should not be disguised as youth engagement.

## Perspectives on Time

People see time differently at different ages. Think about how long summers were when you were a child and you’ll understand.

Younger teens are able to comprehend the future, but most are focused on the present. Youth engagement programs should keep this in mind as they plan action because young people have a particular need to see immediate outcomes. By their late teens young people are becoming more future-focused and need opportunities to learn responsible planning skills. Young adults are often solely focused on the future and need opportunities to stay connected with the experiences they had as young people while moving forward.

Timing is a huge consideration in youth engagement. The time of day, time of week, season, and a person’s age all come into play. Older adults must keep this in mind as they work with younger people. Make sure communication is two-way, being mindful of young people’s perspectives.

## The Youth Engagement Calendar

The following tips can help you think about the timing of community activities and programs while creating a youth engagement calendar.

- ***Constantly check in.*** Young people have schedules, too. Find out what their important dates and times are, including when school starts and ends, deadlines and high-pressure points at work.
- ***Give heads-ups.*** Friendly reminders are appropriate; nagging and complaining about attendance are annoying. Make sure everyone is on the same page.
- ***Competition stinks.*** Remember that young people may have a lot pulling on them. School, work, family, church or synagogue, and a wide range of personal pursuits often compete for attention. Don't compete—coordinate.
- ***Leave time for learning.*** Reflection should happen regularly between planned sessions. Don't overwhelm people with too much at once.
- ***Make time for fun.*** Young people want to have a good time, so make time for that. Remember that when adults are having a good time, young people probably are, too. Just check in and ask.

## Places and Opportunities for Youth Engagement

The opportunities to engage young people in civic and community affairs are almost endless. Means as varied as face-to-face contact and Twitter can encourage young people to check out ways they can make a difference in an area of interest to them.

- ***Nonprofit programs.***
- ***Mind-expanding activities.*** Any learning situation can become a catalyst to engage young people.
- ***Community boardrooms.*** Make room for youth in decision-making.
- ***Community research.*** Engaging young people as researchers can help identify gaps and collect data in ways that many older adult researchers cannot.
- ***Policy-making.*** More than one youth-led campaign in the 1960s had the motto, "Nothing about me without me." Young people, always the target of formal decisions in communities, are rarely engaged in the processes that affect them most.

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# 4

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## When and How to Engage Youth

- **Community improvement.** Young people want to take action in their communities in creative and strategic ways; involve them.
- **Civic organizations.** Civic organizations can play roles in promoting community-wide youth engagement.
- **Schools.** Students should take part in planning, teaching, evaluation and decision-making in addition to fulfilling their obligations as learners.
- **Technology.** Youth and young adults can teach their peers and older adults about technology. They can develop and maintain technology infrastructure in community organizations.
- **Grant evaluations.** Evaluating the effectiveness of grants designed to serve them lets young people impact decision-making beyond their immediate lives.
- **Community budgeting.** Engaging young people as partners in complex community finances gives youth and young adults a purposeful way to change the community.
- **Community design.** Youth and young adults can contribute to community design processes for roads, parks, recreation sites and other physical spaces.
- **Standing committees.** Youth engagement is appropriate in on-going committees throughout the community. Young people can participate as full partners in policy-making, program selection and more.

## STEP FOUR: Key Questions: When and How to Engage Youth

- What accommodations have been made to acknowledge young people's schedules?
- How often will engagement occur? During a single day? Throughout a week? For a month or semester? Longer?
- Is an activity during the day, in the late afternoon or early evening, on the weekends or – for students – during a school break?
- Do you understand that each person's concept of time and urgency depends on the time of life, time of year, season, etc.?



# 5

## Step Five

### Barriers to Engagement

Comprehensive youth engagement is an ideal. Young people surely should become part of the positive, powerful community improvement endeavors going on throughout North Carolina. But the reality is that barriers to youth engagement do exist. The three main categories of barriers to youth engagement are:

- Structural impediments
- Resistance by adults
- Resistance by young people

#### Structural Impediments

Adults working with youth and young adults frequently complain that they would love to open up the decision-making process, but a significant number of decisions are not theirs to give away or even to make themselves. They often are subject to directives from above.

#### Structural barriers may include:

- Policies, regulations and social conditions: Economic and social conditions combined with (or absent of) government policies may affect youth engagement.
- Transportation. Many young people do not have assured access to a vehicle, and public transportation is generally not available in rural communities.
- Food. People must be nourished if they are to participate and perform. When a meeting occurs at mealtime, the organization should provide young people with food or with sufficient funds to pay for the meal.
- Equipment and support. Young people engaged as volunteers or interns should have the same equipment as employees, including computer workstations, e-mail, etc. Failure to provide these tools carries a powerful message that these young people are not as important as older employees.
- Program procedures. With input from youth and adults, organizations should develop policies on youth engagement. Policies need to respect young people's desire for independence while addressing the legal liability of the organization, the comfort level and legal responsibilities of adult staff and parental concerns about safety.

- Training. Older adults need cultural competency training focused on youth. Staff – whether working directly with youth or not – will need to accept the perspectives and ideas of young people and adapt to changing workplace rules to meet their needs.

## Resistance By Adults

Sometimes older adults simply find it hard to share power with young people. Parting with power is not easy, if only because the results are less predictable than when the traditional power-holder maintains control. Asking young people to decide about even the simplest issues can be scary to adults.

### Resistance by adults may include:

- Negative attitudes and stereotypes about young people. These become apparent in staff meetings, in decisions about program activities and even in grant applications. Two common stereotypes about young people are that they can't do anything because they are inexperienced or that they can do everything because they have so much energy.
- Lack of resources allocated to the project, making action difficult.
- Using jargon and language unfamiliar to people from outside the organization.
- Planning things out of reach of young people. An agency's hours of operation usually coincide with times when young people are at school or work. To engage youth and young adults, program planners must find nontraditional times at which to hold important meetings.

### Strategies to overcome adult resistance:

- Ensure family commitment. In the case of teenagers, make sure that they and their parents have adequate information about the event well in advance. Give youth the opportunity to get the necessary permission from their parents before the event occurs.
- Arrange for transportation to and from the event. Youth can have trouble getting a ride to events if their parents are busy. Be prepared to drive youth to and from meetings if no other options are available.
- Ensure meetings are short, concise and to the point. Avoid distributing lengthy documents if at all possible.
- Don't use jargon, acronyms or language known only to insiders. This type of language is exclusionary and pushes young people away.
- Ensure that all adult participants are clear on the role of youth and young adults. Make sure that young people have genuine input and are not there as token youth.

# 5

## Barriers to Engagement

### Resistance By Youth

Older adults sometimes find that their willingness to engage young people is met with reluctance. Young people who have been instructed to do as told can find it disconcerting to be invited – much less expected – to take responsibility.

#### Resistance by young people takes three primary forms:

- Simple refusal: “That’s your job to decide.”
- Testing: Offering over-the-top suggestions or responses to see if the adult is really serious about the invitation to participate.
- Parroting: Repeating what adults have said or guessing what an adult probably wants to hear.

Whether organizations really *want* to engage young people who take risks and make decisions is the first question that each organization must answer.

### Youth Engagement Deal Breakers

Many older adults want young people to feel connected and enthusiastic about their issues, organization or community. A large segment of the population, however, simply *does not know what to do* when it comes to the engagement of young people. For those folks, their best intentions are sometimes undermined by their own ignorance or inability. To begin to address those situations, we need to identify why youth engagement sometimes ends.

An implicit “deal” is made every time a young person is engaged intentionally. Individuals and organizations are essentially saying they trust young people, they believe in young people, and they’re ready to invest in them. That deal can be broken when promises aren’t kept or trust is lost.

***Deal Breaker No. 1. Decisions are made without young people.*** Don’t make decisions for young people without their input. Never make decisions while they are present without inviting their opinions.

***Deal Breaker No. 2. Adults are always in charge.*** Don’t always tell young people what to think and where to go. Assuming full authority when there is a dispute is a clear way to end engagement.

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***Deal Breaker No. 3. Filter what is said and done.*** Don't let adult perceptions of young people's inability and lack of knowledge get in the way of action. Don't speak for youth and young adults when they can speak for themselves.

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***Deal Breaker No. 4. Throw young people into the fire.*** You must inform youth and young adults about the issues they are supposed to be addressing.

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***Deal Breaker No. 5. Sabotaging young people behind their backs.*** Don't refute what young people said after they have left the room. Don't work to undo everything young people said or did in a deconstructive, anti-collaborative fashion. When adults demonstrate superiority to youth, that breaks the deal.

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***Deal Breaker No. 6. Privately deny young people.*** Saying things such as "We don't want to hear from you right now" ends engagement. When young people speak up or show up and adults stand in front of them or speak over them, that is a deal breaker.

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***Deal Breaker No. 7. Publicly deny young people.*** When adults publicly refute the actions of young people after they have been successful in creating change or transforming cultures, that is a youth engagement deal breaker.

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***Deal Breaker No. 8. Punish young people for becoming engaged.*** When young people become enthusiastic and connected to the task at hand, adults may explain that they should not be so engaged. When young people spend time and effort to attend an event only to find it called off, that ends youth engagement. Adults who take the accomplishments of young people away by letting those achievements "rot on the vine" break the deal.

# 5

## Barriers to Engagement

### Overcoming Barriers

#### *Strategy 1. Focus on building strengths*

- Become familiar with the strengths and interests of the young people you work with and create opportunities to foster those strengths and interests.
- Provide skill-building and knowledge-sharing training to organizational staff and community members on concepts and strategies related to the engagement of young people.
- Create opportunities for youth and young adults to express themselves through creative interests, including dance, music, arts, writing, etc.

#### *Strategy 2. Promote youth engagement*

- Learn to view young people as resources, contributors and leaders.
- Involve youth and young adults in designing and delivering programs and services.
- Create forums for young people to present/share their skills, interests and experiences with other young people.
- Support young people in advocating for themselves and their peers.

#### *Strategy 3. Encourage new roles for young people*

- Create opportunities for program staff and young people to meet on an informal basis.
- Invite family members and community residents to recognition events to celebrate young people's accomplishments.
- Create opportunities for young people to showcase their talents to family members, agency staff and community residents.
- Sponsor informational presentations that bring together young people and family members.

#### *Strategy 4. View young people as partners*

- Engage young people in practical organizational and community decision-making that affects them directly, including but not limited to boards and committees.
- Invite youth and young adults to contribute articles to your organization's or community's newsletter.
- Arrange opportunities for young people to educate their families, community residents and local and state elected officials about issues of concern.

#### *Strategy 5. Community involvement*

- Invite community residents to attend youth-led or youth/adult partnered activities.
- Form partnerships with organizations and government agencies to provide more opportunities and supports for young people, design new ways to solicit funding, and develop and promote improved policies for young people.
- Encourage and support young people to engage in community organizations, activities and events.
- Involve youth and young adults in mapping the youth-friendly services and businesses available in their community, creating a directory of community resources and advocating for additional or missing resources.

#### *Strategy 6. Long-term involvement*

- Provide ongoing training opportunities to organizational staff and other community agencies on youth engagement.
- Help policymakers, practitioners and community members create sustainable structures to support youth engagement.
- Invite former youth and young adult participants to special events (such as picnics, holiday parties, recognition events).
- Regularly communicate with former youth participants.



# 6

## Step Six

### Making Youth Engagement Sustainable

Today people tend to be more interested in short-term, high-impact projects rather than large, overarching transformation. This makes creating a program of sustainable youth engagement more challenging.

A support system for sustainable youth engagement has three components.

**Culture.** Culture consists of the beliefs and values within a specific community. Youth engagement is fostered as groups work together to define and reinforce new perspectives of the roles of young people in society.

**Structure.** Structure includes the activities, policies and other functions of a group. Creating structural support makes sustained youth engagement possible.

**Attitude.** Older adults must cultivate a welcoming, encouraging attitude toward youth engagement. “Adult attitude determines youth altitude.”

#### Promotion and Financial Support

Sustainable youth engagement cannot exist without strong communication. Let the community know of your group’s goals, efforts and accomplishments. Regularly reach out through newsletters, websites and other media to inform the community and bring in new young people as well as adult allies.

Youth engagement requires financial commitment. Budgets should designate funds for youth engagement, including training for young people and older adults.

## Steps for Sustainability

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- 1. Identify** common interests of youth and older adults.
  - 2. Connect** broadly throughout the community, engaging various groups of young people.
  - 3. Construct** the group's vision for a better future by tackling projects and doing things.
  - 4. Reflect** frequently on actions, progress and challenges.
  - 5. Continue** the never-ending cycle of identifying new ways to be inclusive and tackle larger goals.
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## Carrying Out Youth Engagement Projects

Successful youth engagement requires focus in project planning and execution. Use the following questions to guide your efforts.

### In Planning ...

- What is your youth engagement project idea?
- Why do you want to do your project?
- Who is affected? Who should be involved?
- Where will the project happen?
- When will the project happen?
- How will the project happen?

### To-Do's

- What are the project's objectives?
- What are the tasks that must happen?
- Who is responsible?
- What are the necessary resources for each objective?
- When will the objectives be completed?



# Step Seven

## Assessing Youth Engagement

### Measuring the Options for Youth Engagement

The following rubrics are designed to help you envision the broadest possible applications of youth engagement throughout your communities.

**Fast Track** = Youth engagement is moving in a progressive fashion toward infusing youth and young adults throughout a community.

**On Track** = The group is facing challenges from multiple factors. Youth engagement is progressing, but not meeting full goals. Changes should be made to ensure forward movement.

**Side-Tracked** = Without full commitment to youth engagement, organizations and individuals have a lot of room to make corrections and transform their opinions and actions affecting young people.

### Assessing Youth Engagement in Community Groups

Purpose	Fast Track	On Track	Side-Tracked
Secure Public Commitment	Organization makes its support apparent in all activities, policies and publicity.	Dedicated, sustainable, focused positions created.	One youth is a member of the board of director or the steering committee.
Increase Staff Responsibility	Youth identify issues and resources they need to create change.	Young people engaged as regular staff or volunteers.	Staff members claim to support youth without actually engaging them.
Sustain Long-Term Support	Adult support for youth is made explicit through fiscal resources, materials, etc.	Staff shows full commitment through ongoing training, support, activities and reflection.	Resources are not allocated to support youth engagement in the organization or its programs.

## Assessing Youth Engagement in Government

Purpose	Fast Track	On Track	Side-Tracked
Secure Long-Term Government Commitment to Youth Engagement	Statutes and laws are changed to create permanent positions for young people to propose, influence and advocate.	Community-wide youth engagement strategies devised and implemented with long-range funding.	Community health fairs and city boards with no young people, or a city-wide youth summit with no adults allowed.
Dedicate Personnel to Youth Engagement	Young people are engaged in regular (paid) positions, volunteer, elected and other opportunities.	Trained staff develops and coordinates youth engagement programs with young people as active volunteer advisers.	Youth councils are made of concerned adults without young people themselves serving.
Secure Broad Support for Youth Engagement	Activities designed by youth/adult partners to promote youth engagement throughout government.	Adults engage young people in advisory capacities only.	Youth engagement training for government workers without young people as participants or trainers.

## Assessing Youth Engagement in Organizational Transformation

Purpose	Fast Track	On Track	Side-Tracked
Change the Climate	All members express clear commitment to youth engagement.	Leaders express clear commitment.	Young people are only ones to express clear commitment.
Modify Procedures	All activities reflect deliberate youth engagement strategy.	Staff trained, but given no resources to engage young people.	Youth engagement is stated as a priority without any actual change.
Reform Policy	All policies are reformed to include youth engagement.	Policies affecting young people reformed to include youth engagement.	Other activity is required to participate in youth engagement activities.
Transform Culture	Youth engagement is a visually obvious strategy for local community building.	Youth engagement is seen as the only strategy for community building.	Youth engagement seen as novel/token tool for making young people happy or keep them out of trouble.



# Step Eight

## Resources for Youth Engagement

Resources for youth engagement abound. Many are available online, and many publications are free to download from websites devoted to youth engagement issues. You'll quickly see that youth engagement is a worldwide phenomenon.

The following organizations, publications and websites address a variety of youth engagement activities. They are the best known and most complete resources available today.

PLEASE NOTE: In addition to the following resources provided by Adam Fletcher, the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center has created the 160-page *North Carolina Youth Engagement Resource Guide (2011)*, which includes information that can lead to grant, scholarship, volunteer and networking opportunities. The guide concentrates on nonprofit and governmental resources to engage youth in a meaningful way. To purchase the guide, contact the Rural Center communications office at 919-250-4314 or [info@ncruralcenter.org](mailto:info@ncruralcenter.org). This content is also available through the online Rural Resource Guide.

### National Organizations

Children, Youth and Environments (CYE) Center for Research and Design – CYE is an international, multidisciplinary network of researchers, policy makers and practitioners working to improve the living conditions of children and youth by improving young people's capacity for meaningful participation in the processes that shape their lives. University of Colorado, College of Architecture and Planning, Campus Box 314, Boulder, CO 80309. (303) 735-5199. <http://tinyurl.com/cp3d6yh>

The Freechild Project – The project seeks to connect young people to social change efforts around the world. Freechild highlights thousands of organizations, publications, websites and resources from hundreds of topic areas focused on youth involvement. P.O. Box 6185, Olympia, WA 98507. (360) 489-9680. <http://www.freechild.org/>

Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development – Partners with foundations, organizations, youth and adults to spark creative processes, build on existing assets and resources and generate practical tools and resources. 6930 Carroll Ave. Suite 502, Takoma Park, MD 20912. (301) 270-1700. <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/>

Movement Strategy Center (MSC) – MSC is committed to advancing the next generation of leaders for a sustainable progressive movement. It is building local, regional and national networks of young activists across issues, constituencies and geographies. 1611 Telegraph Ave Suite 510, Oakland, CA 94612. (510) 444-0640. <http://www.movementstrategy.org/>

Youth On Board – The organization prepares youth to be leaders and decision makers in their communities and strengthens relationships between youth and adults. 58 Day St., Somerville, MA 02144. (617) 623-9900 x1242. <http://www.youthonboard.org/>

## Publications

*15 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision-Making* by Youth On Board. Covering the essential elements of successful project planning, this manual provides stories, hints and tools to make your project successful. Order it from <http://www.youthonboard.org>

*Adults as Allies* by Barry Checkoway. This publication increases the awareness of the role of adults in youth involvement by posing questions, offering activities and providing stories that highlight effective intergenerational interaction. Find it at <http://tinyurl.com/cdouad7>

*At the Table: Making the Case for Youth in Decision-Making: Research Highlights from a Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations* by the Innovation Center. This summarizes key research findings from the Youth in Decision-Making research study. Download at <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>

*Creating Youth/Adult Partnerships* by the Innovation Center/National 4-H Council. For those just beginning to explore youth-adult partnerships as a strategy for community and organization building, this book offers step-by-step tools to prepare youth and adults to work as a team. Designed with even the most novice trainer in mind, this curriculum provides activities that challenge preconceptions, explore benefits, assess readiness and build trust to strengthen their work in partnership. Order at <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>



# 8

## Resources for Youth Engagement

*The Evolving Capacities of the Child* by Gerison Lansdown. The principle behind this work recognizes that as young people acquire enhanced competencies, there is a diminishing need for protection and a greater capacity to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. The purpose of this publication is to open the discussion and promote debate to achieve a better understanding of how children can be protected, in accordance with their evolving capacities, and also provided with opportunities to participate in the fulfillment of their rights. A necessary read for all youth involvement practitioners. Download at <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/evolving-eng.pdf>

*Making Space/Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations* by the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center. This publication is a powerful tool highlighting the successes and challenges of operating authentic Youth Voice programs. There are in-depth features on six programs across the nation, providing vital details and tips. Download at <http://movement-building.movementstrategy.org/resources>

*Maximum Youth Involvement: The Complete Gameplan for Community Change* by Wendy Schaetzel Lesko. This manual answers nearly 100 questions on how adults and organizations can support young people as equal partners and effective advocates in changing community norms and policies plus a 40-page Appendix with reproducible checklists and interactive skill-building activities. Download at <http://tinyurl.com/csfoj65>

*The Power of an Untapped Resource: Exploring Youth Representation on Your Board or Committee* by the Youth Adult Partnerships Project. This handbook was created by Alaskan youth for boards or committees interested in including young people. It lists basic steps for creating an effective board that includes youth representation, such as how to prepare boards for youth involvement, create a position, choose representatives, address legal issues, recruit youth and educate youth members. Available at <http://aasb.org/content/bookstore>

*Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making* by Gerison Lansdown. This publications makes the case for a commitment to respecting children's rights to be heard and the need to consolidate and learn from existing practice. It draws on much of the already published research and thinking in the field and on a wide range of international initiatives. It seeks to provide practical guidance on the lessons learned to date in working with children as partners. It is a contribution to the development of tools for those who see children's rights to be heard as a means of promoting and protecting their other rights. Download at <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/290>

*Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy* by Phillip Haid, Elder C. Marques and Jon Brown. This short paper explores successful models of youth participation in policy development and identifies barriers to meaningful youth involvement in the policy process, based on case studies. Download at <http://tinyurl.com/atkt2c7>

*Younger Voices, Stronger Choices: Promise Project's Guide to Forming Youth/Adult Partnerships* by Michael McLarney and Loring Leifer. This is an important primer on involving youth in meaningful ways, co-written by a youth and an adult. This is the foundational text for many other books on youth involvement. Order from your local bookstore.

*Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on The Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations* by Shepherd Zeldin, Annette Kusgen-McDaniel, and Dimitri Topitzes. This report discusses the impacts young people have on adults and organizations when they are involved in significant decision-making roles. It will be of interest to policy-makers and practitioners, and concludes by commenting on the conditions that are needed to allow organizations to include more youth in their decision-making processes. Download at <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/store/108>

## Websites

Child Friendly Cities (CFC) – A UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre initiative that focuses on youth involvement throughout communities. The website is a tool for exchanging information, sharing data and networking among communities around the world. Users can access information about the activities, objectives and methodologies of CFC projects, links with CFC partners and examples from Child Friendly Cities worldwide. <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/>

What Kids Can Do – This site features stories from students across the United States who are leading community and school change projects. <http://www.what-kidscando.org/>

Youth Voice and Engagement – This comprehensive web portal is a collaboration of several partnerships and agencies in New York State, including the NYS Partnership for Children, the ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence (UCE) and the ACT Downstate Center for Excellence. There are hundreds of publications, programs and other tools for Youth Voice practitioners. <http://www.youthengagementandvoice.org/>

## Youth Engagement Assessment

Adapted from the Youth Engagement Assessment created by Adam Fletcher.

How do you know how youth engagement is doing in your program, organization or community? This evaluation of youth engagement can be conducted by young people and/or older adults. It can be used by anyone who wants an honest, thorough examination of youth engagement. For “yes” or “no” answers, please elaborate. If the answer is “no,” ask yourself/your group what steps can be taken for improvement.

### CULTURE

1. Do all young people feel safe to speak?
2. Do all young people feel safe to participate?
3. How are the perspectives and actions of young people being engaged?
4. How are the perspectives and actions of young people respected?
5. How are the perspectives and actions of young people responded to?

### ACTION

1. Have young people determined what constitutes engagement?
2. Have young people worked with older adults to identify community issues, challenges or problems?
3. Are young people engaged in analyzing the situation?
4. Have young people worked with older adults to identify possible solutions or goals for their communities?
5. Do young people feel fully informed about what matters to them?
6. Are young people engaged in creating the action agenda?
7. Are young people equitably involved with adults and other young people in deciding action priorities?
8. Are young people engaged in approving the programs, services and activities to implement the action?
9. Are young people engaged in monitoring the implementation of the action?
10. Are young people engaged in evaluating the impact of the action and related programs and activities?

## YOUTH READINESS

1. What steps have been taken to ensure that the level of participation is appropriate for the ability of the young people involved?
2. Describe the ways that the developmental needs of young people are taken into account.
  - Are there leadership training opportunities available?
  - Are there knowledge building opportunities available?
  - Is the self-image and confidence of young people built appropriately?
3. Does the program, organization or community allow for varying levels of engagement from young people?

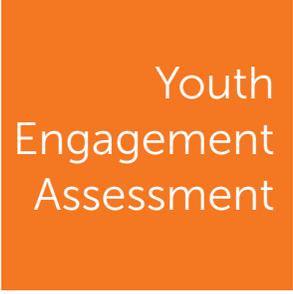
## ADULT READINESS

1. Do adults feel fully informed about the issues, policies, programs, services and/or activities that affect young people?
2. Have adults received significant training and support to engage young people successfully?
3. Do adults have enough resources to successfully engage young people?
4. Describe the ways that the developmental needs of adults are taken into account.
  - Are there leadership training opportunities available?
  - Are there knowledge building opportunities available?
5. Does the program, organization or community allow for varying levels of engagement from adults?

## MOTIVATION

1. Is the push for youth engagement driven by young people?
2. Is the push for youth engagement driven by the needs of older adults?
3. Is the push for youth engagement driven by external factors?
4. Do young people feel pressured to be involved?

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## SUSTAINABILITY

1. Do young people and adults participate in combined training activities?
2. Are young people engaged in training other young people to participate?
3. Is there an active process to continuously recruit new young people?
4. Are young people satisfied with their involvement?
5. Are adults satisfied with their involvement?
6. What steps are taken to overcome youth disengagement and fluctuating involvement?
7. What steps are taken to overcome adult disengagement and fluctuating involvement with young people?

## ASSESSMENT

1. How does your program, organization or community provide for formal and informal feedback from young people on the process of engagement?
2. How does your program, organization or community assess youth engagement?
3. Are the events, activities and numbers of participants measured?
4. Are the levels, motivations and impacts of young people monitored and reported?
5. Are there formal evaluations of youth engagement completed by young people and adults?
6. Is a youth engagement community impact evaluation conducted?
7. Are the views of young people collected and distributed to young people and adults? If they are not, how can they be?

## BARRIERS

1. Are the barriers to youth engagement acknowledged and addressed?
2. Do young people understand the intentions of the process, action and outcomes for the program, organization or community?
3. Do young people know who made the decisions about youth engagement and why they were made?
4. Is youth engagement recorded, reported in writing and distributed?
5. Do young people receive a report (oral or written) on the decisions made?
6. Were false and negative assumptions about young people's abilities to participate deliberately addressed by young people and/or adults?
7. Are all adults clear about the organization's intent for youth engagement?



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