

Welcome to the
**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
TOOLKIT**
An Overview



acknowledgements

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The Youth Engagement Toolkit was produced in 2013 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia and includes:

1. Youth Engagement Toolkit Overview
2. Youth Engagement Toolkit Champion Guide
3. Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide
4. Youth Engagement Toolkit Evaluation Tool

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WELCOME TO THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT!

The Youth Engagement Toolkit is a user-friendly resource developed to support and strengthen youth engagement practice. It includes:



Resource Guide



Overview



Champion's Guide



Evaluation Tool

The Toolkit was created because it's time for organizations to start thinking differently about how to engage young people at an organizational level. How are youth involved as partners in your organization? Do youth have opportunities to contribute to the development of programs and services? Are youth involved in evaluating and improving practice? Do youth help shape the structure of your organization?

The Toolkit supports ministry staff and community partners to find ways to make young people genuine partners in their work. Engaging youth contributes to the effectiveness of programs, services and policies. It helps keep organizations, enthusiastic, energized and informed. It also supports young people to develop to their full potential and nurtures the next generation of advocates for youth.

WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth engagement is the "meaningful participation and sustainable involvement of young people in shared decisions in matters which affect their lives and those of their community, including planning, decision-making and program delivery" (Smith, Peled, Hoogeveen and Cotman, 2009).

In other words, youth engagement is about young people offering their expertise and their experience so an organization can do a better job of creating and sustaining the services, opportunities and supports that young people need for healthy growth and development.

Youth engagement is an empowerment approach to practice. Its purpose is to strengthen the meaningful and continued involvement of young people in the work of organizations. Through youth engagement, youth become genuine partners in the organization. Youth participate in meaningful ways like planning and making decisions that affect themselves and others. By working together in youth-adult partnerships, both groups can contribute, teach and learn from each other.

The engagement of young people can happen in many ways. Many practitioners are used to thinking about engaging youth on an individual level. However, the concept of youth engagement is about how youth are involved in and contribute to an organization as a whole.

The development of the Toolkit began in 2009. It was created through a partnership between Ministry of Children and Family Development staff, youth and the University of Victoria Child and Youth Care Program. The Toolkit was developed using a methodology called Community-Based Research and Evaluation. Using this methodology, youth and adults worked together as co-researchers and evaluators to develop the Toolkit.

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WHAT IS INVOLVED WITH PUTTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INTO PRACTICE?

Youth engagement is an art rather than a science. It is a process that happens over time. Youth engagement is based on relationships and it works best when it is tailored to young people and their local context.

The benefits of youth engagement are greater than the challenges, but it does take time to become familiar and comfortable with practicing youth engagement. Organizations must provide the commitment and resources required to make youth engagement part of their day to day work.

WHY IS THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT INTERESTED IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth engagement is recognized nationally and internationally as a best practice within the social service sector. It is a rights-based approach to practice. It upholds Article 12 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which says that youth have a right to participate.

Youth engagement is central to the ministry's strategic and operational plan. It seeks to identify and build on the strengths of children, youth, families and communities by engaging them as active participants in the design, implementation and review of services.



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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Everyone benefits from the active participation and engagement of youth.

Youth engagement helps young people to:

- Recognize that everyone has value. Youth, like everyone else, have rights that should be respected.
- Understand that youth have a significant role in creating a better system for all young people.
- Know that their voice is important, regardless of their successes, challenges, strengths or limitations.
- Give back to their community.
- Develop resilience, and a sense of pride and accountability.
- Build self-esteem.
- Develop leadership and problem solving skills.
- Become connected to other youth and their community.
- Break down generational barriers between youth and adults.
- Develop a sense of belonging and reconciliation with the system.
- Develop skills and knowledge that support transitions to adulthood and independence.

Adults benefit through:

- A greater balance between positive experiences with youth and crisis intervention.
- Skill development and career enhancement.
- A more rounded and honest service assessment.
- Greater job satisfaction and workplace health
- Youth and adults working side by side helps promote greater understanding of each other. This can contribute to respectful and positive working relationships.
- Additional access to resources.

Organizations benefit from:

- Greater knowledge, skills, and creativity available during planning and decision-making.
- Improved quality and effectiveness of policies, programs and services.
- The ability to make more informed decisions that will help meet the needs of children and youth.
- Better ability to make changes that promote the growth and development of young people.
- Greater transparency and accountability to youth receiving services.

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USING THE TOOLKIT

The Toolkit is a user-friendly resource developed to assist ministry teams and community partners to assess, improve and sustain their youth engagement practice. The Toolkit guides a team through a process of four collaborative meetings. The first meeting orients the team to the toolkit process and explores their values and beliefs about youth engagement, the second one involves assessing current youth engagement practice, the third involves creating a plan to strengthen youth engagement and the last meeting reviews the progress made with the plan.

Once teams have finished the Toolkit process, the important work they have started to build and strengthen youth engagement should continue! As teams build their youth engagement practice, they may choose to use the Toolkit repeatedly to re-evaluate and create new goals.

The Toolkit does not provide a recipe for “doing” youth engagement. Instead, the Toolkit provides a roadmap and tools to support the process. It is designed so that it can be used flexibly. Teams can choose to modify the process to work best for them in their environment.

WHO CAN USE THE TOOLKIT?

The Toolkit can be used by any group, team or organization. What you'll need to do is build a team of people that support youth empowerment and leadership. Your Toolkit team can include youth, front-line practitioners, managers, and community partners. It doesn't matter if you are new to youth engagement or very experienced and looking for new ideas. It can be used by anyone with an interest in youth engagement!

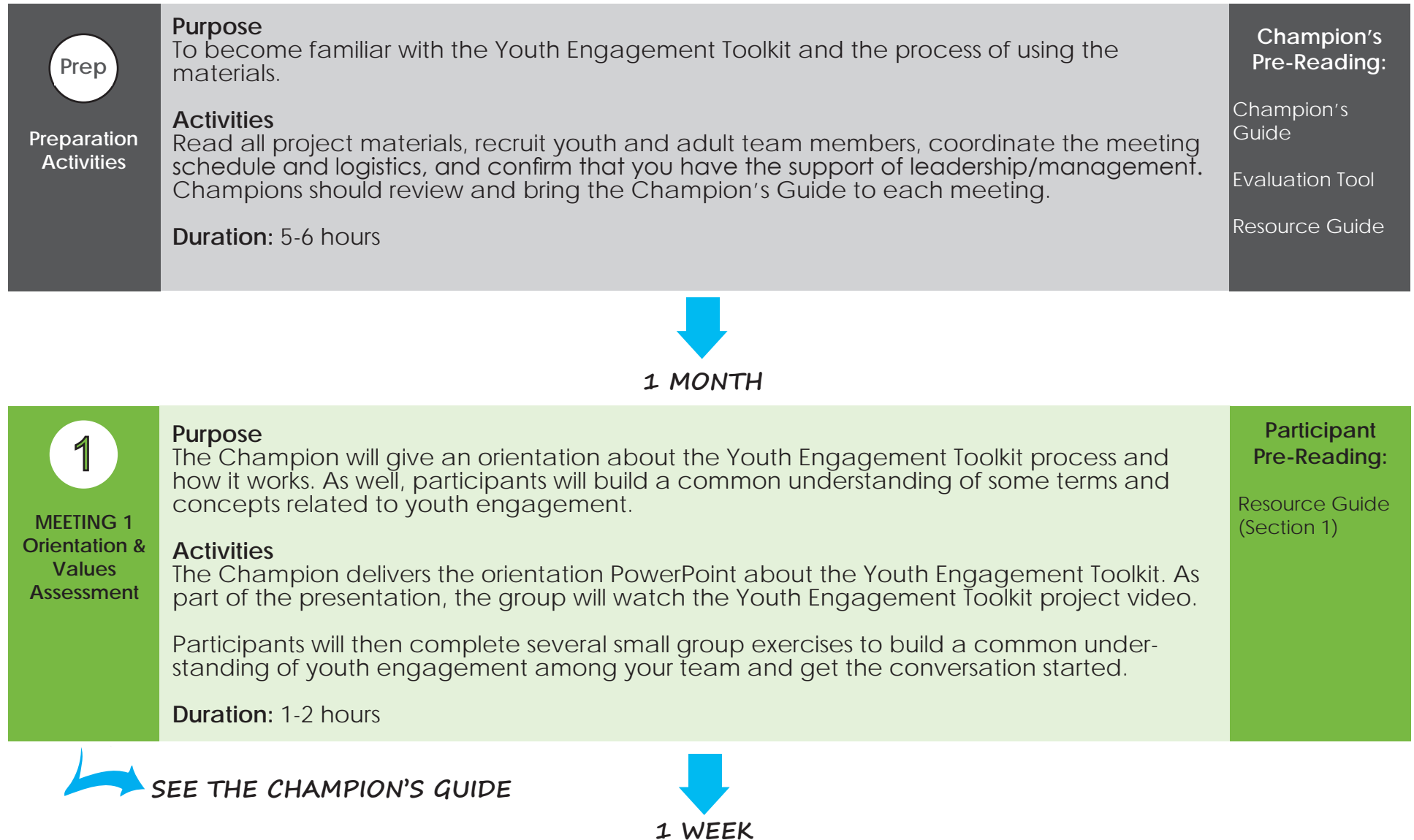
There are four different types of participants in the Toolkit process: the **Champion(s)**, **youth** and **adult** participants, and **management**. Each will have a different role and responsibilities (for more detail, refer to the Champion's Guide). It goes without saying that the voices and experiences of the youth participants are central to the process. The Champion is the person or people who will lead the Toolkit process, a role that can be shared between different people, including youth. The role of adult participants is to attend the meetings, participate in the process and assist with the recruitment and support of the youth. The role of management is to make youth engagement a priority within the organization by endorsing and supporting the Toolkit process.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that we've got your attention, it's time to start building youth engagement. A good first step is to get support from management. This is foundational to moving forward. The next step is to identify a youth engagement champion to lead the Toolkit process. To learn more about using the Toolkit, read the Champion's Guide. It contains all of the resources and information that the champion will need to know to lead the Toolkit process. To learn more about youth engagement, read the Resource Guide for practical tips and strategies.

overview: using the youth engagement toolkit

The following diagram summarizes the purpose, activities, timelines, and required reading for each meeting during the Youth Engagement Toolkit process. The Youth Engagement Champion(s) should refer to the Champion's Guide for detailed instructions for each meeting.



2

MEETING 2
Using the
Evaluation
Tool

Purpose

Participants will assess areas of strength and challenge in youth engagement in their organization. The discussion and findings from this meeting will help participants identify areas where they can start to build youth engagement within their identified work. These findings will help guide participants in the development of a Youth Engagement Development Plan in Meeting 3.

Activities

Participants will use the Evaluation Tool to rate and discuss current youth engagement practices.

Duration: Up to 3 hours

**Participant
Pre-Reading:**

Evaluation Tool
(Optional)



SEE THE CHAMPION'S GUIDE



1 WEEK

3

MEETING 3
Youth
Engagement
Development
Plan

Purpose

Participants set goals to build youth engagement in their organization by developing a Youth Engagement Development Plan.

Activities

Based on their discussions using the Evaluation Tool, participants develop a Youth Engagement Development Plan with 2-3 goals for the team to work towards.

Duration: 2-3 hours

**Participant
Pre-Reading:**

Resource Guide
- Section 2



SEE THE CHAMPION'S GUIDE



2-3 MONTHS

4

MEETING 4
Youth
Engagement
Development
Plan (YEDP)
Review

Purpose

Participants will review their progress towards their youth engagement goals.

Activities

Participants will review the progress they have made towards goals they set on their Youth Engagement Development Plan. Participants can change, adjust or set new goals as needed.

Duration: 1-2 hours

**Participant
Pre-Reading:**

Resource Guide
- Section 2



The
**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
TOOLKIT**

is brought to you by



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**University
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School of Child and Youth Care