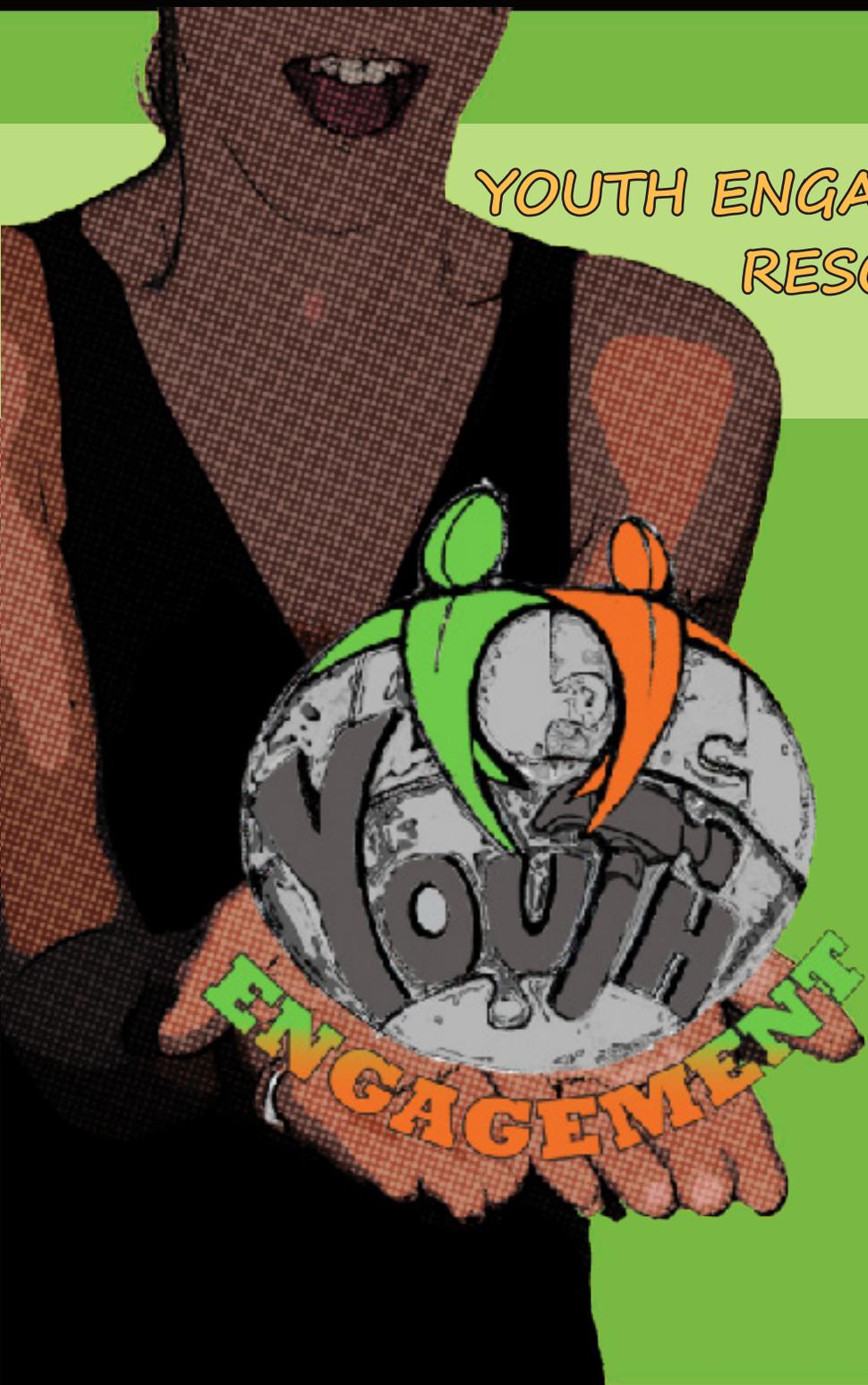


YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT RESOURCE GUIDE





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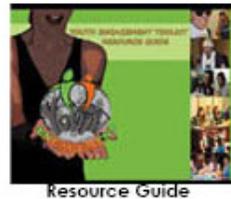
The Youth Engagement Toolkit was produced in 2013 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia and includes:

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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introduction

Welcome to the **Resource Guide** for the Youth Engagement Toolkit! The Resource Guide provides in-depth information about youth engagement, as well as practical strategies for engaging youth. It is a great resource for anyone interested in learning more about youth engagement. The Resource Guide can be used on its own even if you're not using the full Toolkit.



Resource Guide



Overview



Champion's Guide



Evaluation Tool

The resource guide is divided into three primary areas:

- 1 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND FOUNDATIONS**
This section reviews the key concepts of youth engagement- what it is, why it's important, the benefits, and how it can be practiced within organizations.
- 2 PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**
This section provides practical strategies for engaging youth and tips on how to overcome some common challenges.
- 3 ENGAGING YOUTH FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS**
This section provides context for working with different youth communities including: Aboriginal youth, deaf and hard of hearing youth, newcomer youth, LGBTQ2S youth, youth in care, young parents, homeless youth and youth in custody

For Toolkit users, the Resource Guide is intended to be read by youth and adult participants. Participants should read Section 1 (Youth Engagement Framework & Foundations) in preparation for Meeting 1 and Sections 2 & 3 (Practical Strategies for Youth Engagement & Engaging Youth from Diverse Backgrounds) in preparation for Meetings 3 and 4.

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youth engagement framework & foundations

1.0 DEFINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Organizations and communities regularly make decisions about issues and services that directly affect youth, such as services for at-risk youth, public transportation, education, parks and recreation, etc. However, although organizations often seek the input of their stakeholders, youth themselves tend to have few opportunities to give their input on the issues that affect them. But the truth is young people are citizens too with rights and responsibilities! According to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, they have the legal right to express their views freely and fully participate in all matters that impact them.

Young people are a huge untapped resource for organizations and communities. They are the real experts on their experiences, needs and interactions with organizations. They can offer organizations fresh perspectives on issues, innovative problem solving, the ability to rise above traditional boundaries in our society to make new connections, and the courage to pose tough questions that need to be asked. Organizations that engage youth in decision-making processes make decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to youth needs and interests².

Youth engagement is the concept and practice of meaningfully engaging youth in decisions that affect them, their peers and their communities. Youth engagement ensures that young people become an integral part of the work of organizations and communities and that their voices help shape the future. Through youth engagement, youth are no longer seen as recipients of services but as citizens that are actively engaged and involved in the issues and processes that affect them. Engagement is more than just a dialogue between adults and young people; it is about adults and youth working together as equal partners to make decisions and create change. Organizations practicing youth engagement will benefit from the expertise and experiences of youth and will be able to do a better job of creating and sustain-ing the services, opportunities and supports that young people need for healthy growth and development.

Additionally, practicing youth engagement helps organizations further positive youth development and build the capacity of young people. Organizations can improve the quality and quantity of youth opportunities by meaningfully engaging young people in the work itself. The principles and practices of youth engagement described in this Resource Guide can help build the capacity of organizations and communities to ensure that all youth, particularly those least likely to succeed without help, believe that they have the responsibility and resources needed to make their communities a better place for themselves, their families and their peers.

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There are many definitions and terms used to describe the practice of youth engagement. For example, "youth involvement", "youth participation", "youth volunteerism", "positive youth development" and "inclusion" have all been used to discuss youth engagement.

In this toolkit, youth engagement is defined as 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"³.



Youth engagement practices have their roots in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, which is the most universally supported human rights treaty in history. The *UNCRC* acknowledges the right of a child or youth to express their views, to be heard and to have their views given due weight according to their age and level of maturity.

The *UNCRC* introduces a philosophy of respect for children as active participants in their own lives and acknowledges their evolving capacity and gradual progression into adulthood. Further, it acknowledges the importance of a child or youth's input to informing the decisions affecting their lives, at both an individual and systemic level. (See Article 5, 12, and 13 -17 of the *UNCRC* for more information)⁴.

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1.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

There are several key characteristics that guide youth engagement practice. While this is certainly not a comprehensive list this section describes some of the most important aspects of youth engagement⁶.

1. Opportunities for skill development and capacity-building

Youth engagement provides many opportunities for youth to learn new skills and abilities. These can include the development of academic, intellectual, civic, emotional, physical, employment, social, and cultural competence.

2. Opportunities for leadership

Young people are given opportunities to lead and assume some decision-making power. Youth help make decisions about the design and direction of programs and services geared towards them. For example, this could include youth participation on adult-led boards and committees.

3. Reflection on identity

Youth are supported to develop a critical and political analysis of identity. This can be achieved through anti-oppression training, discussion, and creative expression. Identity reflection allows youth to see how systems affect their lives and how they affect their community and society as a whole.

4. Development of social awareness

Youth are encouraged to look beyond what impacts them personally to see what impacts others. The process can be described as going from self to social awareness,

learning the responsibilities of citizenship, and recognizing their ability to be agents of change in their communities.

5. Mutual ownership

Youth and adults jointly identify areas of need and connect with a shared sense of purpose. This is often represented by the selection of issues and activities that are relevant to both youth and adults.

6. Positive youth adult partnerships

Relationships are characterized by:

- supportive and caring adults;
- mutual trust and respect;
- good communication;
- democratic processes; and
- communication of results.

7. Organizational support

Youth engagement is often characterized by collaboration between youth serving agencies, communities, and organizations. Knowledge is shared and applied to avoid duplication of services and to fill service gaps.

8. Achievable goals are celebrated

Goals identified in developmental plans are clearly laid out and celebrated upon completion. This shows young people that progress is being made, skills are being developed, and they can be successful.

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1.2 BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

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
- Greater understanding between youth and adults from working side by side. 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.

Communities benefit from:

- Generating a pool of knowledgeable, active citizens with exposure to addressing issues and challenges through collaboration.
- Greater understanding between generations by allowing youth and adults to work together towards a common goal.
- Increased understanding and consideration for others who reside in their community.
- The opportunity to challenge stereotypes held about a diverse group of individuals (different ages, gender religions, ethnicity, etc.).
- Encouraging democracy and social responsibility, and increasing social capital.

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1.3 MODELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE

An organization, community, or system can practice several forms of youth engagement at the same time. For example, an organization may have young people participating in programs that have been designed by adults and, at the same time, the organization may also have a youth committee engaged in the development of future programming.

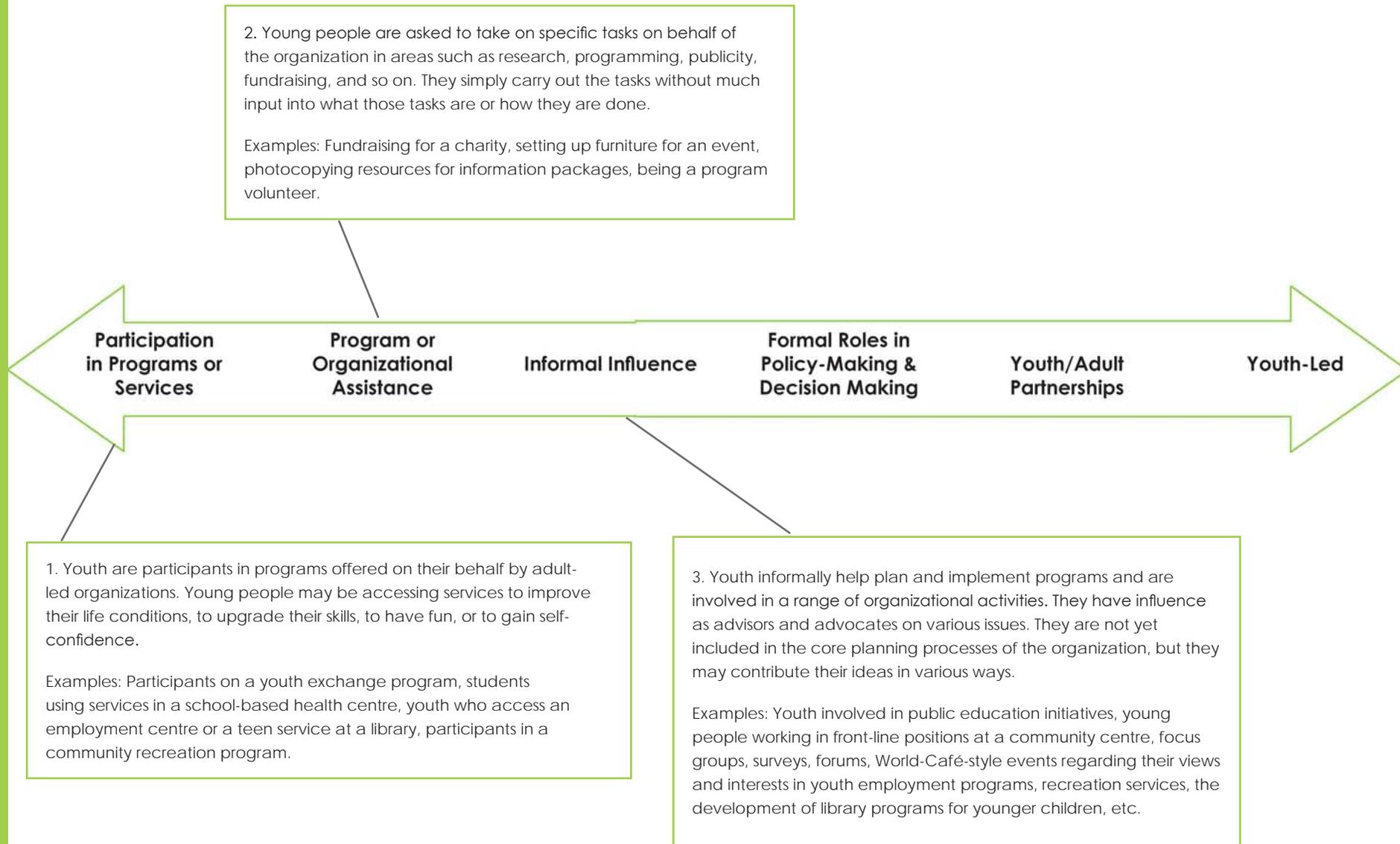
There are a number of different models of youth engagement that demonstrate the range of ways youth engagement can occur. We're highlighting just two models of youth engagement here.

A. Youth Engagement Spectrum

The Youth Engagement Spectrum, developed by the HeartWood Centre, identifies different opportunities for youth engagement in organizations, communities, and systems. Youth engagement opportunities exist along a spectrum, however being at one end is not necessarily considered better than being at the other. There is no right or wrong here. The various forms of youth engagement will generate different degrees of individual, organizational, and community outcomes. The HeartWood Centre suggests exploring the full spectrum of possibilities in order to find the right fit for your organization and the young people that you serve.



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The information in the Youth Engagement Spectrum section is used with permission from the Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development.
<http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/documents/YouthEngagementSpectrum.pdf>

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Youth are integrated into existing organizational structures and have equal status in its decision-making processes. As well, adults recognize youth members as full partners that share responsibility and accountability for the development and implementation of the organization's programs and services.

Examples: An organization in which half of the Board members are youth, a skateboard park that is organized and maintained by youth and adults together, an education program for children that has been designed and implemented by older youth

Note: Some of these programs/services may be entirely youth-led with adults playing support roles.

**Participation
in Programs or
Services**

**Program or
Organizational
Assistance**

Informal Influence

**Formal Roles in
Policy-Making &
Decision Making**

**Youth/Adult
Partnerships**

Youth-Led

Youth participation in core planning processes is viewed not just as an opportunity for their own development, but also as a valued contribution to the whole organization. Their input, including their right to vote, is respected on formal decision-making bodies such as Boards and committees. As well, young people may hold staff positions with a high level of authority.

Examples: Youth as members of a Board of Directors, young people in senior level staff positions, municipal youth councils, an advisory committee at a youth health centre.

Young people control the governance and decision-making of their own organization, or initiative. All of the organizational responsibilities - program creation, financial management, program facilitation, and service provision - are carried out by youth.

Examples: Youth-governed drop-in centre, university student union with full student governance, meals-on-wheels service prepared and delivered by youth, a First Nations youth media service.

Note: Adults, if present at all, serve only as resource people or advisors.

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B. Hart's Ladder

Another model of youth engagement is Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation⁷.

When adults struggle with how youth involvement can work, there is a tendency to practice on the first three rungs of the ladder, referred to as non-participation. When adults see value, meaning, and strength in youth participation and engagement, their work is reflective of the higher steps on the ladder.

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

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1.4 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Practical Examples of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement can be incorporated into the work of an organization or community in many different ways. The following are some core areas where youth engagement can be built^{8, 9}. There are many, many other ways that youth engagement can occur as well!

Governance and Policymaking: Youth can take part in key organizational decision-making by serving on the Board of Directors or key committees. Youth can also participate in policy making, allowing their input to shape the policies that govern an organization.

Training and Outreach: Young people can contribute to training staff and other young people by determining training needs, designing training programs and delivering training. Adults benefit from hearing the perspectives of youth and youth have opportunities to develop their communication and leadership skills. Youth can also participate in hiring processes and decisions.

Organizing and Planning: Youth can help design and plan projects in lots of ways including determining service needs, developing action plans, conducting community outreach and evaluating outcomes.

Activism and Outreach: Young people can work with staff to organize community members around issues. Youth often know best how to recruit other youth to get involved and stay involved with an organization.

Communication and Media: Youth can help organizations communicate key messages to the public by contributing to press releases, facilitating public forums, creating newsletters, or using alternative media to tell a story.

Service: Young people can directly deliver services as staff members or by assisting with program activities.

Fundraising and Philanthropy: Young people can become involved in raising and giving money through fundraising efforts. They can also become involved as volunteers within an organization, for example acting as a peer mentor or assisting with program activities.

Research and Evaluation: Young people can contribute to research and quality improvement efforts by contributing their feedback. They can also be involved as evaluators and researchers by interviewing other youth or community members, working with staff to analyze data or presenting it to stakeholders.

Advice and Guidance: Youth can offer their insights into different issues concerning an organization through youth advisory councils or youth forums. Youth can provide regular input to the organization, can work on specific projects or can identify community needs and suggest service improvements.

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1.5 ROLES WITHIN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Different people within an organization or community have different roles and ways to participate in youth engagement. Good youth engagement practice involves youth and adults collaboratively identifying knowledge, skills, and interests, and setting clear roles.

Practitioners

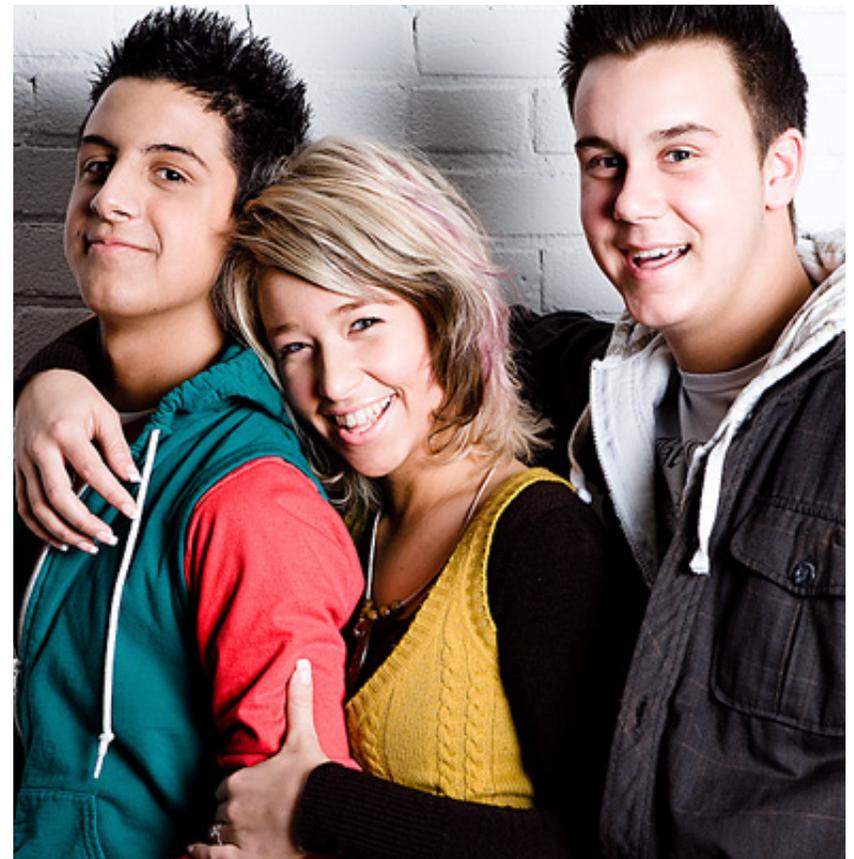
Practitioners are responsible for developing their youth engagement skills and sharing their knowledge of youth engagement with others. They can advocate for practicing youth engagement in different projects or initiatives within the organization. Practitioners play a key role in identifying young people to include in youth engagement initiatives. They support youth who participate by encouraging their involvement, mentoring them, and finding ways to acknowledge their contributions.

Managers & Leaders

Managers and leadership are responsible for providing an environment where youth engagement is supported and practiced. They can identify areas to build youth engagement and support the development of youth engagement within the organization. They can help minimize the systemic barriers that may prevent workers from practicing meaningful youth engagement. They will be instrumental in providing the support, feedback and advocacy necessary to secure the resources needed to move forward with effective youth engagement practice.

Youth

Youth are responsible for acknowledging that they have a role in creating a better system for all young people. Regardless of their successes, challenges, strengths or limitations, their input and voice are important to share. They are responsible for participating in processes where their shared viewpoints, experiences and advocacy for change may or may not improve their individual situations.



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1.6 STRENGTHENING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE

Organizations sometimes encounter challenges when trying to build youth engagement. Organizations that have failed to engage youth in a meaningful, respectful way may find that some of the following roadblocks are present:

- There is no organizational commitment to engaging youth. Their presence serves to suggest that youth are involved; however, they have little to no power and their participation is tokenistic or opportunistic.
- When youth are asked to participate, their voices are not requested during conversations or considered during decision-making.
- Youth are viewed as a cheap source of labour, a way of getting things done that the organization would not be able to do otherwise. Youth may be brought in as volunteers and receive none of the benefits of being an employee of the organization.
- Youth are invited to attend and/or participate in high profile or media events, but there is no investment in their long-term skill development and no effort to offer them long-term support.
- Youth are asked to engage, invest time and energy in a project, and the project is cancelled.

Practicing youth engagement can be a huge shift in attitudes and practice for an organization. Building youth engagement in any organization or community is not without challenges. It requires dedication, hard work, commitment to the vision, and lots of preparation to fully integrate youth engagement within an organization. Here are some systemic barriers, challenges and considerations you may need to address when strengthening youth engagement practice.

Fully understanding youth engagement

Since so many different terms have been used to talk about youth engagement, many people have an incomplete understanding of youth engagement. Most practitioners recognize the concept of engaging youth on an individual basis, but some struggle to understand youth engagement at an organizational level. Additionally, there has been a great deal of focus on the right to be heard from the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. However, the *UNCRC* describes a wide range of rights that affect youth engagement, including the right to information, to seek redress and the right to respect for the evolving capacity of youth in the exercising of rights.

Ensuring there is legislation, standards, and policies that establish the right to participate

It is not sufficient to rely on good will or individual commitment on the part of adults. Be an advocate for change and encourage modifications that will further support the meaningful engagement of youth by the system.

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Addressing adult resistance

Youth engagement is a big shift for organizations and adults may initially be reluctant to share decision making power. The presence of youth in public roles challenges the existing relations between children and adults and requires significant social adjustment. Work needs to be undertaken with adults to sensitize and educate them about young people's participation rights and the positive implications. Additionally, cultural barriers may exist, for instance in cultures where youth are expected to be silent in the presence of adults.

Strengthening skills and abilities

Promoting youth participation requires a wide range of skills and experiences. Initiatives often fail because the adults working with youth require support and resources to strengthen their skills and understanding of how to engage meaningfully with youth.

Make engagement meaningful and focused

In order to develop significant engagement, youth must know that their involvement is valued and that the experience will be worthwhile. In other words, the contributions of young people need to be taken seriously and acted upon. Advocates for youth who are dedicated to moving youth engagement forward play an important role. See section 2.1

Commitment to youth development

Some organizations assume that young people are not responsible or mature enough to participate. Particularly when organizations serve youth in difficult situations, they may view young people as causing problems or needing to be fixed. In some cases, organizations believe that their work is too technical for youth to participate. However, when youth take on roles of responsibility they acquire new competencies, as well as an appreciation for the skills and knowledge required in different fields. By participating, they learn and develop and become capable of being effective partners with adults.

Working structures in offices

Young people shouldn't necessarily be expected to adapt to the working structures adults are accustomed to. Instead, there are a few ways to accommodate youth and ensure that they are able to participate comfortably. For example, add flexible hours to work with youth, consider meeting in the evening or on weekends to accommodate school or work schedules of youth; if your office space can't be adapted to feel youth-friendly, consider meeting outside a corporate setting; and don't wear business suits and formal attire during meetings with youth.

Adapt organizational culture

An organization needs specific structures or processes in place that really engage with youth, listen to what they have to say, and make it possible for them to participate on a regular basis. Organizations need to adopt a long-term philosophy of youth engagement and ensure that all workers embrace youth engagement to be successful.

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1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The success of youth engagement efforts depends on whether youth engagement is practiced in an ethical, respectful way. If youth engagement efforts are merely tokenistic or superficial way youth can end up feeling like they are not respected or involved. To help organizations respectfully engage with young people, there are eight principles to follow to ensure youth engagement is practiced ethically¹⁰.

Youth Engagement is not a program

Youth engagement should be viewed as a natural way of working in the organization rather than as a special program.

Contributions match the organization

Young people and adults who are working with an organization should be recruited for their knowledge, skills, interests and commitment to the organizational mission.

One person cannot represent many

A young person should not be considered "the youth voice" at the table- it should be acknowledged that everyone at the table brings different perspectives to the issue.

Debate as a learning tool

Debate is a key element of personal and organizational growth. A learning organization is defined by an environment where ideas can be raised freely, challenged and valued.

Dignity and safety

Under no circumstances should young people or adults in the workplace feel that placing themselves in an emotionally, spiritually, physically or cognitively unsafe space is expected or required by the organization.

Avoiding false expectations

It is important to be honest about the changing role of youth within an organization including recognizing that there are limitations that correspond to age, experience, education and training.

Balance and accessibility

Most people require workplace accommodations in order to support them in making the optimal contribution to their organization, including young people.



practical strategies for youth engagement

2.0 GETTING STARTED

Creating your strategy

As demonstrated by the Spectrum of Youth Engagement Practice (see Section 1.3), there are a variety of ways to practice youth engagement. The first step to building youth engagement is to explore the full spectrum of possibilities in order to find the right fit for your organization and the young people that you serve.

- *Consider* how different methods of youth engagement match the skills and interests of young people and match the goals and objective of the organization.
- *Think* about what you hope to accomplish through youth engagement and ensure that members of your organization are on board.
- *Plan* ahead for outreach, orientation and training.
- *Assess* what barriers to youth engagement exist within your organizational culture and how you might overcome any barriers.
- *Determine* what resources you'll need.

Identifying and celebrating champions

Staff play an important role in building and facilitating youth engagement practices in an organization. Staff members that connect with youth, offer support and build trusting relationships are important to getting and keeping youth involved with the organization. In almost every organization you can find a youth engagement champion who can be a valuable resource in strengthening youth engagement practices. Youth and adults can share the champion role

A youth engagement champion is someone who is strongly motivated to support, promote and develop youth engagement in the organization. Champions are dedicated to working with youth, raising issues that are important to them, and willing to find new ways to work around common challenges when practicing youth engagement. They are fair, responsive, informed, and dedicated to building positive relationships with young people. Youth will often recognize them as allies and people they can approach when they experience personal challenges or want to celebrate positive life events.

If you struggle to identify champions in your organization who seem to have these characteristics, ask youth when they come in who has been most helpful to them, as this will be a place to start in discovering youth engagement champions.



practical strategies for youth engagement

Recruiting youth

A key challenge for organizations trying to practice youth engagement is choosing strategies to interest youth in becoming and staying involved. It is critical to try to engage youth from a variety of backgrounds that are representative of the community. (See Section 3: Engaging Diverse groups of youth for more info). Too often the focus is on involving high achievers, or youth that are already engaged, while overlooking the contributions that less engaged youth could provide. The drawback of this strategy is that you end up over-representing the perspectives of youth who share one particular characteristic and you don't represent the full range of youth served by your organization. Look for new ways to connect with youth who have not previously had the opportunity to participate, perhaps because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack supports, or are hard to reach.

Get the word out!

The first step to recruiting youth is to raise awareness about the opportunity to get involved. Youth note that the most useful ways of getting the word out to them include:

- Social media (check your organization's policy on social media!)
- Word of mouth (peer to peer)
- Posters
- Newsletter articles
- Networks of professionals (youth advisory councils, youth workers, youth service agencies)
- Community associations that serve youth.

When considering how to present the opportunity for youth involvement, try to keep the wording short, clear, and consistent. Ensure that the opportunity is accurately described to avoid young people having false expectations that can potentially disappoint or discourage their participation in future opportunities. For more details on potential communication strategies, refer to the resource guide section, "Working between Generations." (see p. 34-35)

To screen or not to screen?

Some organizations support additional screening of youth through an application process. However, before deciding to require an application process, consider the benefits of building the personal capacities of youth through their engagement with the organization. Avoid becoming focused on identifying only youth typically described as high performers or achievers. The process of coaching young people and watching them grow has a positive impact on everyone involved and should not be overshadowed by perceptions of a youth's current ability or capacity to contribute.

Overall considerations

Below are some questions that may help generate a better representation of youth during recruitment:

- Is the chosen youth representative of the young people served by a program or service or affected by a policy or procedure?
- Does the youth appear to have a strong interest in being involved?
- Does the youth have the potential to grow in capacity and effectiveness if given the opportunity and proper support?
- Is the youth excited about the opportunity?
- Is the youth willing to go through training and mentorship as part of their involvement in the initiative?

practical strategies for youth engagement

2.1 MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

Building partnerships

Building partnerships with youth is essential to the success of any youth engagement efforts. It's important that adults are willing to form meaningful connections with youth and establish trusting relationships. Youth Engagement Champions can play a crucial role in building trusting relationship built on respect. Strong adult allies can provide incentive for youth to get involved and stay involved with organizations.

Tips for building meaningful partnerships¹¹

DO

- Show you care about your job by going out of your way to help
- Look at youth, make eye contact
- Spend time talking to youth, asking open ended questions that build a conversation
- Listen with undivided attention, avoid multitasking (responding to emails and texts) and be present
- Be dependable and pride yourself on being true to your word
- Show appreciation, recognize youth contributions in a personal way
- Relax and be real, you don't have to be on your guard
- Show interest, ask youth what they can do and go where they go
- Build in time for maintaining relationships
- Ask youth for their feedback on what's working and what needs to change
- Laugh with them and at yourself, humor is important to building trust
- Ask youth to help you, they have many useful ideas
- Be flexible (meet after government work hours or on weekends)
- Challenge them, push them to be their best and share what you know without restrictions
- Let the youth take responsibility and leadership
- Keep information shared by youth confidential
- Admit when you're wrong
- Act as a resource for information and connections
- Understand boundaries
- Be willing to help (in any manner possible)
- Take youth to participate in healthy activities (like working out or going for a walk)
- Keep your energy up

practical strategies for youth engagement

Tips for building meaningful partnerships

DON'T

- Be judgmental (especially with regards to age, gender, race, and personal opinions)
- Be invasive (especially when it comes to space and questions)
- Ignore what youth have to say
- Have an attitude
- Be demanding
- Miss appointments with youth without calling no matter how busy you are
- Talk down to youth or acting in a condescending manner
- Be short tempered or too business-like (allow room for humour)
- Sugar coat your conversations (be honest and transparent with information – it's OK to say you don't know or I'll get back to you on that)



practical strategies for youth engagement

Empowering Youth

The idea of youth-adult partnerships is new for both adults and youth. Young people are traditionally used to adults trying to direct their behavior. It can take a while for youth to feel like they can safely embrace shared decision-making power and leadership within the organization. Adults can play a key role in helping youth feel like they have more power and remain on equal footing with adults in the group.

Anderson and Sandmann (2007) outline a five step model to help promote empowerment, spread out leadership responsibilities and balance influence and power more equally with youth.¹²

1. Fostering self efficacy

Find ways to increase a youth's belief in their capabilities to perform responsibilities by helping youth be successful and celebrating their successes.

Ask yourself...

How do I help members celebrate their successes to build their efficacy?

Do I share examples of others' accomplishments to build a member's belief in their own capabilities?

How do I build members' confidence by ensuring they have small successes along the way?

2. Setting a context for action

Young people are more likely to feel empowered when they understand the organization's mission and priorities, and how their responsibilities help accomplish the goals of the organization.

Ask yourself...

Do I give meaning to responsibilities by revealing how they fit into the mission of the organization?

How do I help members understand how responsibilities help us to reach the goals of the group?

Do I describe how responsibilities are important to the success of the group?

3. Structuring the task

Ensure that youth are supported to meet expectations and complete tasks by setting boundaries for members to carry out responsibilities and decision making.

Ask yourself...

Do I set clear timelines for the responsibilities?

Do I make sure members understand the timeline before taking on responsibilities?

Do I outline the major steps necessary to complete responsibilities?

practical strategies for youth engagement

4. Creating a sense of ownership

Giving youth real responsibilities and a level of independence to choose how tasks are completed. Help them understand that they are in charge of how the work gets done.

Ask yourself...

- Do I increase ownership by pushing responsibilities back to members when they try to defer the responsibilities to me?
- Do I resist taking back responsibilities once they are delegated to members?
- Do I rely on members to make their own decisions about how the work gets done?

5. Coaching for performance

Actively support youth as they work to achieve their goals by providing regular feedback and support.

Ask yourself...

- Do I provide constructive feedback to members as they carry out responsibilities?
- How do I actively support members as they carry out their responsibilities?
- Do I have conversations with members to evaluate their performance?

Information Sharing

It's also important to ensure that youth have all the information they need to participate fully. Make sure youth understand the broader context around a topic, and keep them up to date on any developments that result from their input or actions. Be sure to provide information that is accessible, youth-friendly and age-appropriate.

Feeling fulfilled

Youth and adults should both benefit from youth engagement. Once youth are empowered to participate fully, there are a few ways to make sure youth and adults find their involvement meaningful and fulfilling.¹³

- Do check-ins and check-outs during each meeting to personalize the experience.
- Seek out the opinions and perspectives of all youth and adults who participate and respect their position even when you do not agree.
- Provide positive feedback to and support for ideas shared.
- Support everyone to share their ideas and report back on the end result of the input.
- Provide youth with meaningful responsibilities and expectations; treat them as equals.
- Promote mutual ownership of the processes used and the outcomes achieved for the project or program.

practical strategies for youth engagement



Building capacity

One of the major benefits of youth engagement is that it provides opportunities for youth to learn and grow. By involving young people in the work of the organization, they will naturally encounter many opportunities to develop new skills as they take on new responsibilities, work on new tasks, and collaborate with others. There are also ways to promote learning and development by purposefully providing opportunities for youth to learn new skills, as well as by using teachable moments to facilitate development. Organizations should consciously foster development and growth by providing opportunities to youth in one or more of the following ways:

Provide opportunities for growth

Provide opportunities for skill development and capacity building:

- Support youth to work on tasks that will build a particular skill
- Offer workshops that interest youth (ie. Cultural awareness, conflict resolution, etc.)

- Attend conferences
- Offer training days (ie. Facilitations training, research and evaluation methods)
- Support youth to earn certificates (First Aid, etc.)

Provide leadership opportunities

- Allow youth to identify issues that are important to them
- Youth can facilitate meetings
- Youth can lead projects
- Encourage youth to present the results of small group activities back to the larger group
- Youth can present at conferences, to the organization or community
- Transfer real decision-making power to youth

Identify teachable moments

Teachable moments arise naturally when practicing youth engagement. A teachable moment is an opportunity to identify, encourage and acknowledge behaviors that lead to positive changes to the individual and, as a result, to a group as a whole. Teachable moments are unplanned and arise when you see an opportunity to expand upon an issue or a topic that participants are engaged in right that moment. Teachable moments may require a bit of a digression to explore the topic, but they offer an excellent opportunity for development since youth are already engaged and interested in the topic. For example, when youth are asked to give a presentation to the community, a teachable moment exists to learn about public speaking and presentation techniques. Or if an adult expresses that she is unhappy with a decision made, a teachable moment exists to respectfully explore differing viewpoints.

practical strategies for youth engagement

By using a real life situation, the learning is immediately applied and more easily remembered. Teachable moments can strengthen relationships and build trust. They can create a lasting impact and memory for those involved. Teachable moments must always be used in a respectful manner, and it can be helpful if learning occurs through a dialogue, rather than just through one-way instruction. It also helps to invite adults and youth to use teachable moments to teach others by

saying things like “I really liked the way you did this, I was wondering if you could teach me how” or “I wanted to get this information across because I believe it is valuable for young people to know but I don’t know the best way to bring it across. Do you have any ideas on how I could do this?” Now you are presenting teachable moments and creating a space where this behavior is encouraged, supported and more likely to be accepted by others.



Celebrate Achievements

It's important to take time to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements and efforts of youth & adults. Helping youth & adults recognize their accomplishments is a great way to encourage sustained participation in youth engagement efforts. Here are a few ways to create opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate efforts:

- Give youth an opportunity to present their work to the organization or community.
- Have celebratory occasions to mark major milestones and acknowledge the work youth have done.
- Acknowledge extra effort or excellent work. You might consider formalizing this with a thank you card, certificate of achievement, or token of appreciation.
- Take time to regularly reflect on accomplishments. We don't always realize the impact of our efforts unless we step back to consider the larger picture.

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2.2 WORKING WITH YOUTH

YOUTH-FRIENDLY MEETING TIPS^{14, 15}

- Create a youth-friendly meeting space. Ensure that the meeting location is not intimidating to youth. If possible, select a location where youth feel comfortable (ie. community centre, youth serving agency, mall location, etc.) that is also accessible by public transportation, unless other arrangements have been made to get young people there.
- Be welcoming and friendly. Ensure that all participating adults are prepared to be friendly and accommodating of youth.
- Choose meeting times that work for youth. Most adults work regular business hours (8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday) however youth may attend school, work or have other commitments during those hours. To promote fairness and ensure a good turn out, consider holding meetings outside normal work hours at a time that accommodates both adults and youth.
- Alternate meeting structures from time to time by inviting a guest speaker, using educational games to introduce new information, attend an event etc.
- Number of Participants – Numbers can have a big impact on the productivity of a meeting. If there are a large number of attendees, consider other ways of working through the agenda, like working in smaller groups, so that everyone has an equal chance to participate. Keep in mind that sometimes trying to find your voice in a sea of voices can be intimidating.
- Provide orientation materials with a quick rundown of the organization, project, meeting procedures and timelines to help new members get up to speed faster.
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms or at least explain them first.
- Use Check-Ins & Check-Outs at the beginning and end of meetings. Sometimes things distract us from being present and fully participating in a meeting. By providing an opportunity at the start of the meeting, people get the chance to share where they're at and ways to support them or keep them engaged can be identified. At the end, ask how well they felt the group accommodated them, whether they found the meeting effective, what could be done to improve the meeting and offer additional support after the meeting.

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YOUTH-FRIENDLY MEETING TIPS

- Consider providing food, transportation, child care.
- Break the Ice. Provide lots of opportunities for group members to get to know each other (ice breakers, check-ins etc.) and personalize the experience.
- Send out meeting reminders via a combination of text, email, phone call, and social media sites, i.e., Facebook.
- Provide paper, pens and other materials to promote full participation.
- Keep resources for youth so that they do not have to carry binders of information with them to each meeting.
- Provide items for youth and adults to play or draw with as some people struggle to concentrate without them.

WRITING YOUTH-FRIENDLY DOCUMENTS

- Consult with youth and get their ideas on what needs to be emphasized to catch young people's attention.
- Use straightforward wording and keep it brief.
- Use examples and stories to emphasize key points.
- Use tables and graphs to summarize points.
- Include interesting quotes and consider pulling these points out of the document.
- Be clear and descriptive with your titles and headings to help focus the document.
- Provide details about where to find more information.
- Make documents available online.
- Ask youth to help format and design the layout of the document.

practical strategies for youth engagement

Incentives

It is widely accepted that if young people are invited to participate in the work of an organization that one of the ways to promote partnerships and recognize the time and expertise that young people bring to the table is to offer some form of compensation. Youth may experience tangible benefits from their involvement (skill building, relationship-building, etc); however, consideration must be given to providing additional financial incentives that show the youth that their hard work and contributions are recognized and valued.

Providing additional financial incentives has a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of youth. Besides providing an obvious incentive to join and imparting a sense of responsibility, they also support youth who are unemployed and address issues of access and equity. For those who struggle with economic hardship, volunteerism may be a luxury that they can't afford. Financial incentives provide a means for these individuals to enjoy the benefits of volunteering - the opportunity to work with their peers, to develop skills, and give back to their community. It's important to let the youth know you appreciate the time they take to share their advice and unique perspectives and of course, these types of incentives do assist with their commitment to participate.

Types of Non-Financial Incentives include:

- Job experience
- Mentoring
- References
- Certifications from training
- Letters of support

Types of Financial Incentives include:

- Cash honorariums/Gifts or Gift Certificates – the amount given will depend on the type of length of meetings and involvement.
- Transportation - youth may not have the financial resources to cover transportation costs so it's a good idea to have a ready supply of public transit tickets or to provide the transportation directly.
- Child care – some youth may be parents and require funding to cover childcare costs.
- Food/refreshments – sharing food is a great way to build relationships and helps out many youth who may be having difficulty making ends meet.



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TIPS FOR USING HONORARIUMS (INCLUDING GIFT CERTIFICATES)¹⁶

- Honorariums payments should be clearly defined as either compensation for time and efforts, or a token of appreciation.
- Check your organization's policy for providing compensation and/or establish your own guidelines in partnership with youth to set up a system for tracking financial compensation which includes a form that youth must sign that acknowledges receipt honorariums, bus tickets, etc.
- Ensure there is equity around compensation. Conflicts arise most often when some youth participate more or less than others but receive the same compensation. There needs to be a principled approach to how money is awarded or withheld. Engage the youth in a dialogue on what they believe is fair and develop policies together.
- Discuss honorariums with youth. While it may be the monetary rewards that initially attract some youth, if the program has real value they should come to feel that the skills and experience they have gained are more significant. Depending on your budget these items may vary so it will be important to discuss this with youth and come to agreement about what the compensation will like and that it is understood by all.
- Ensure youth know honorarium payments do not mean they have a job. It is ill-advised to compare participation in a program with holding a job. Youth should be clear that they are not in fact employees of the organization and not entitled to employment rights protection.
- Honorariums are considered taxable income under the Income Tax Act. In the case where a gift is substituted for honorarium (gift in lieu of money), it is still classified as a taxable benefit by Canada Revenue Agency.
- Organizations need to be flexible and willing to accommodate the unique needs of youth. For example, some youth may not have bank accounts or have easy access to bank machines. Consider providing honorariums in cash rather than by cheque and have them sign that it has been received.
- Regular and timely payments are important as some may rely on the payments. It is best to provide a schedule of payment so that they have a sense of when and how much they will receive.

practical strategies for youth engagement

Be flexible

All groups change and shift over time particularly as new members come and go or as youth engagement efforts go through various stages. When adults mirror flexibility and the ability to adapt to these changes it can be contagious. Communicating disappointment and excitement during the process also models how to work through change, removing the anxiety that it may cause for some people.

Methods of managing change include:

Revisit the group's ground rules (particularly when new members join).

Review the purpose of youth engagement activities and the vision for these activities within the organization.

Create a mentorship role for longstanding members to help new members transition into the group.

Celebrate the planned move of a member from the group.

Share feelings about the changes or the changing dynamic in the group.

Make yourself available for youth to speak openly and freely one to one about changes.

Limit down time

Young people are likely to remain actively and meaningfully engaged when they are contributing ideas that guide the work and are given the choice of how best to lend their skills to a project. Try to keep the momentum and maintain regular contact with involved youth. If members continuously feel they are making progress on a project and believe this project will make a difference to youth in the future, it is more likely that the group will remain strong and connected.

During periods of down time, youth value ongoing personal contact or notification of other opportunities to remain connected and engaged. It can be as simple as making a phone call, sending an email, or sending a message on a social media site like Facebook just to check in. When this does not occur, young people may feel that relationships feel more transactional and limited rather than personal and meaningful.



practical strategies for youth engagement

TROUBLE-SHOOTING

Things don't always go as planned. Challenges can arise when youth start to be absent, late or appear disinterested. A dominant personality in the group can prevent equal participation of all youth. Negative group dynamics may develop if youth are not getting along. Here are some strategies for dealing with these issues.¹⁷

- Encourage young people to develop some ground rules or a code of conduct. Include possible consequences if a rule is broken. Then post this information in the room so that if an issue comes up people can be redirected to the arrangement agreed to.
- Adjust compensation and rewards. Ask the group at the beginning if they agree for honorariums or incentives to be modified when people arrive late, do not produce as expected, or do not show up. Remember the key is to treat everyone the same. Tension can rise if people feel they are being treated differently or contributing more than someone else with little benefit.
- Ask why is this occurring? Do not assume that you know why a situation appears the way it does. It could be that school, sports, employment or hobbies are getting in the way of following through on the commitment to the project. Maybe they are having challenges trying to connect with family, a worker or a caregiver and this is diverting their attention. Consider whether there's something you could do better. It may be that certain skills need to be taught before a standard can be met.
- Aim to problem-solve rather than punish or alienate. Issues of performance in a group setting can be addressed through collective problem solving and avoid blaming or shaming. Look for win-win solutions
- Recognize and award collective achievements. Provide positive reinforcement when youth work effectively. Highlight the positives.
- Change the dynamics of the group by splitting into smaller groups. This can help ease tensions and ensure that all youth get an opportunity to share their opinions.
- Challenge negative statements, actions and behaviour. Help youth explore what's going on and relate it back to the group's code of conduct.

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Communicating with youth

Different generations have different ways of communicating. Working in partnership with youth requires awareness of the ways people in different age groups communicate. Awareness of these differences can help organizations reach out to youth, improve communication, and keep them engaged. Always consider the medium, style, content, speed and frequency of information you share with youth.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Simmons National Consumer Study conducted in the fall of 2008 identified the following results.

1. 2/3 of youth own cell phones and use it for the camera, Internet, games and texting functions
2. Girls are the dominant users of camera features while boys are more likely to record video and upload it on sites like YouTube
3. Most youth (93%) spend time online
4. Girls are more interactive Internet users than boys
5. The sites most often visited by youth included Google, Ask, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Tumblr, Yahoo, YouTube and MySpace
6. 77% of youth online go to get information about news and current events
7. 59% of youth online use the Internet for creative work such as online blogs or Web pages, videos, photography, stories and other art work
8. 53% of youth online use social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook and 41% of those send daily messages to their friends
9. 49% of youth social network users use the networks to make new friends
10. Email is NOT a popular method for youth to reach their peers
11. Today's youth have never known a world without computers.
12. Texting has replaced talking among youth.
13. Youth use several types of entertainment and media devices simultaneously (such as sending instant messages or emails to others watching the same TV show)

practical strategies for youth engagement

It helps to be aware of the differences between your own style of communicating and the communication styles of Gen Y'ers. Here are some of the differences in the way different generations communicate.¹⁸

GENERATION	Veteran (born before 1946)	Boomer (1946 to 1964)	Gen X'ers (1965 to 1981)	Gen Y'ers (1982 to 2000)
Style	Formal	Semi-formal	Not so serious; irreverent	Eye catching, fun
Content	Detail; prose-style writing	Chunk it down but give me everything	Get to the point – what do I need to know?	If and when I need it, I'll find it online
Context	Relevance to my security; historical perspective	Relevance to the bottom line and my rewards	Relevance to what matters to me	Relevance to now, today and my role
Attitude	Accepting and trusting of authority and hierarchy	Accept the "rules" as created by the Veterans	Openly questions authority; often branded as cynics and skeptics	OK with authority that earns their respect
Tactics	Print; conventional mail; face-to-face dialogue or by phone; some online information and interaction	Print; conventional mail; face-to-face dialogue; online tools and resources	Online; some face-to-face meetings (if they're really needed); games; technological interaction	Online; wired; seamlessly connected through technology
Speed	Attainable within reasonable time frame	Available; handy	Immediate; when I need it	Five minutes ago
Frequency	In digestible amounts	As needed	Whenever	Constant

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Generation Y (those born between 1982 and 2000) were brought up by their boomer parents and teachers to speak up and contribute their ideas. Gen Y'ers expect a constant flow of information compared to previous generations. They want to feel connected, updated and involved.

Here are some key points to consider when communicating with them^{19, 20}:

- Provide shorter, more frequent updates. If possible **find ways of delivering real time messages.**
- Create authentic communications. Being authentic means more than telling the truth, it means answering the question "why do they care?" in down to earth language and being transparent.



- **Turn youth into change agents.** Youth want to make tangible contributions and are willing to spend their available time if they feel they can make an impact. If they are properly engaged, they will become your biggest advocates and virally spread the messages and news.
- **Develop mechanisms to generate great ideas.** Ask the question "How can fresh ideas from youth be identified?" "How can we leverage these broad thinkers and capitalize on their insights?" Youth need to be invited into and valued as members of our community.
- Make sure the message is relevant to the lifestyle of youths and that the media used is one that resonates with them.
- Consider your audience and take into account youths' attitudes, opinions, knowledge and behaviours.
- Develop multimedia communication campaigns that incorporate words, music, and images in the messaging.
- Ask youth what ideas they have before creating your communication campaign.
- Address the multicultural diversity of the youth market paying close attention to the communities and subcultures they belong to.
- Use social media to reach youths and to encourage them to share your messages.

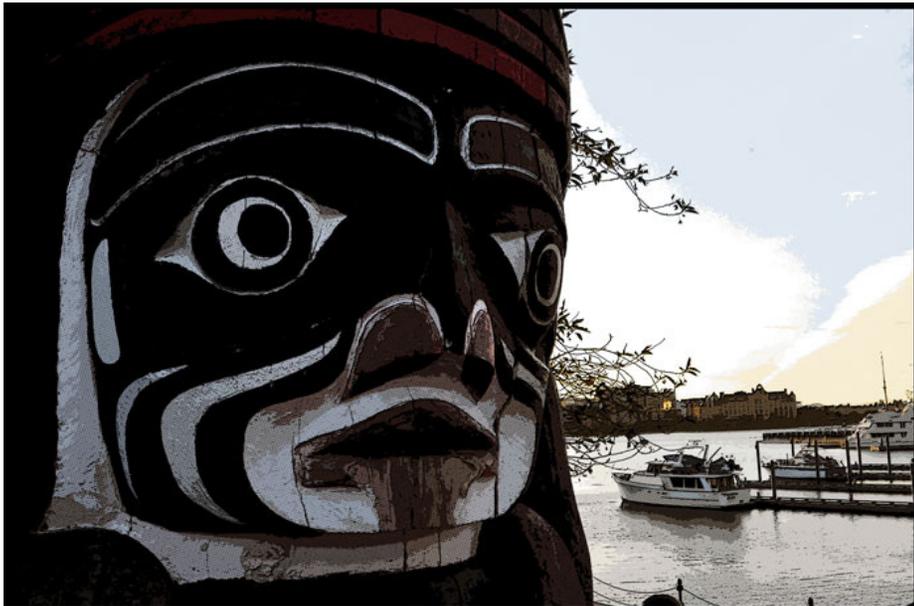
engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

3.0 ENGAGING YOUTH FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

Youth come from many diverse backgrounds and cultures. Different youth face different challenges and have different barriers to participating in youth engagement opportunities. Organizations have to be creative about engaging young people who aren't always at the table. Encourage youth to speak about their backgrounds & acknowledge how their perspectives have added to the value of the discussion. This section provides context for working with different youth communities including: Aboriginal youth, deaf and hard of hearing youth, newcomer youth, Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer/questioning, and two spirited youth (LGBTQ2S) youth, youth in care, youth struggling with mental health or additions, youth with special needs, young parents and homeless youth.

Remember that some youth may be triggered or traumatized as you discuss different issues and identify areas where policy, programs and services can be improved for the benefit of youth. Consider adding structures to your meetings so that people can check in at the beginning of the meeting and check out at the end so that you stay on top of what's working and when additional support might be required. When young people get the chance to address their concerns in real time they are more likely to feel safe and in a position to return and contribute to your group.

3.1 ENGAGING ABORIGINAL YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES



This section is not meant to be a comprehensive look at the considerations required to engage people. Instead, this section aims to introduce some high level tips and considerations when engaging with Aboriginal youth and communities. This section was written after consultation with Aboriginal youth, Elders, and the Directors of Aboriginal Service Change from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. In addition, several documents were reviewed including: MCFD's Aboriginal Framework documents, Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families, and Dr. Martin Brokenleg's work on the Circle of Courage.²¹ It is important to remember that this section is merely a starting point when engaging with Aboriginal people. Consider every engagement as an opportunity to learn and to grow.

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

Historical context

It is important to acknowledge the experience of Aboriginal peoples in BC and Canada if we are to truly engage their youth and their communities. Aboriginal people have seen economic, spiritual, and social development grievously impacted by government policies and practices both at the provincial and



federal level. The establishment of residential schools, reserves and the Indian Act all resulted in a widespread and intergenerational loss of culture, language, community, and identity. Aboriginal people were denied citizenship and the right to vote until 1949 provincially and 1960 federally.

The impacts of these practices and laws continue to impact Aboriginal people today. Some Aboriginal youth respond to the many negative connotations of being Aboriginal in Canada by distancing themselves

from their identity as Aboriginal people. There are many others who have not had the opportunity to experience or develop a strong cultural identity due to the loss of teachings and traditions within their families or communities. This is especially so for many urban Aboriginal youth as well as those growing up in the child welfare system.

In BC, the provincial government and MCFD have committed themselves to pursuing reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. This commitment includes believing that:

- Aboriginal peoples have the right to identify with and thrive as a member of their culture of origin;
- It is the intrinsic right of indigenous children, youth, and families to define their own cultural identity;
- It is important to learn from past mistakes and avoid repetition;
- Aboriginal people should be a part of a united and mutually respectful system; and,
- The goal of programs and services is to free the potential of each person.

It is important to acknowledge that there are also many Aboriginal youth who do have a strong sense of their cultural identity and who are playing an important role in rejuvenating their traditions in BC and Canada. For years, Aboriginal people have had to learn to walk in two worlds: the colonized world and their evolving traditional world. This experience can be both difficult and exciting, and those who go through it may experience a broad range of emotions. Prior to engaging Aboriginal youth, it is useful to take into consideration their perspective and allegiance to both the traditional and the colonized world and to support Aboriginal youth and communities to participate in a climate of mutual understanding and respect.

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

Aboriginal people in BC

BC is home to the second largest Aboriginal population in Canada after Ontario. According to the 2006 Statistics Canada census, over 196,000 people in BC identify themselves as First Nation, Métis or Inuit, roughly five percent of the total BC population.

	First Nations	Metis	Inuit
On Reserve	49,275	695	15
Off Reserve	80,305	58,750	780
Totals	129,580	59,445	795

BC is home to over 200 First Nations and 30 language tribal groupings. Vancouver is home to the third largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada with 40,300 Aboriginal people (after Winnipeg and Edmonton).

Despite making up only 5% of the general population, Aboriginal children and youth make up over 25% of the children in care between birth and age 19.²² MCFD developed an Aboriginal Service Delivery Change Framework and noted that in order to move forward they were committed to practicing the principles of reconciliation which included:

Self-determination

The role of children and young people in making decisions that affect them and the notion that Indigenous peoples are in the best position to lead the development of laws, policies, research and practice that affect their communities.

Culture and language

Policy and practice are most effective when they reflect and reinforce the intrinsic and distinct aspects of Indigenous cultures and developed by Indigenous communities, reflecting local and cultural context.



Holistic approach

Recognizing that the youth is shaped by her/his culture (including traditions, spirituality, and social customs), environment, social relationships, and specific abilities and traits. Seeing youth as children of the world and providing them opportunities to understand, interact with and respect peoples of different cultures.

Structural interventions

Appreciating that protecting the safety of children and youth must include resolving risk at the level of the child, family and community as well as addressing structural risks and that meaningful responses to both are required.

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

Non-discrimination

Indigenous peoples are entitled to equal access to resources and services that are responsive to their needs, and the unique cultural context of their experience. Indigenous ways of knowledge must be given credence and interventions given first priority.

The principles set forth a way for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to work through the four phases of reconciliation process:

1. Truth telling: the process of open exchange (listening and sharing) regarding child welfare's past;
2. Acknowledging: affirming and learning from the past and embracing new possibilities for the future;
3. Restoring: addressing the problems of the past and creating a better path for the future; and
4. Relating: having recognized that Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions about Indigenous children and youth, moving forward in a respectful way to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous children and youth.

Special Considerations for Engagement with Aboriginal People

The following list highlights just a few of the things to consider when engaging with Aboriginal peoples.

Purpose

- Are you clear about why you are engaging with Aboriginal peoples?
- Do you have executive support for the level of engagement you are proposing?

Focus

- Have you considered all relevant Aboriginal voices on the matter?
- Are there overlapping interests on the issues(s) among Aboriginal people?
- Ask those you hope to engage whether there are other people whom you should consider inviting to the table. This will help you better understand traditional social structures.
- Review the governing systems of those Aboriginal communities you hope to engage to have a working understanding of any protocols that should be considered and followed.
- What are their protocols of engagement?

Elder involvement

- Consider a face-to-face meeting with an Elder for introductions before the meeting.
- Have you allowed Elders the opportunity to speak first and last?

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

Recognition of traditional territory and peoples of the land

- Acknowledge the traditional territory where a meeting is being held.

Women

- Are you recognizing the role of women within Aboriginal communities?
- Are you making efforts to capture the individual and collective perspectives of Aboriginal women in your engagement?
- Are you ensuring that Aboriginal women's political leadership and political organizations are being engaged?

Youth

- Youth may require additional orientation to help them prepare and contribute to discussions with those already familiar with and involved in specific projects. Keeping the orientation youth friendly and offering a variety of formats to familiarize them with the information is useful (online, written, verbal briefings etc.).
- Try to make sure you include representation of both male and female Aboriginal youth.
- Acknowledge the discrimination faced by youth due to both their age and their ethnicity.

Gifting

- You may want to consider gifting your distinguished and/or invited guests in addition to honorariums. Seek advice from communities of origin as to what might be considered appropriate.

Respect, reconciliation and the relationship

- Have you considered a "neutral" location if you are involving multiple Aboriginal communities?
- Do you know the traditional name of the group?
- If you are meeting with one Aboriginal group, try to have the meeting in the location of that group.
- Traditional introductions are common among Aboriginal cultures. Prepare to share your own family background at meetings.
- Ask as many questions as required in order to remain informed and respectful.

Urban

- If your engagement issues impact urban Aboriginal people, are you engaged with Friendship Centres?
- Are you mindful of other organizations, apart from Friendship Centres, that serve urban Aboriginal communities and could be included in your engagement?
- Are you respecting local protocols even within the urban setting?

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

Considerations for Aboriginal youth programming

In the report titled, "Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers", the following concepts are used to explain the principles for successful programming for Aboriginal youth:

Understanding and Integrating Cultural Identity

The loss of cultural identity and values is a major risk factor faced by Aboriginal youth. It is critical to address this loss in programming for youth.

Varying exposure to culture

Embrace, encourage, and create opportunities for Aboriginal youth to learn where they come from and who they are.

Range of cultural connectedness among youth

Aboriginal identity may not be something the youth have explored before. Some may feel very resistant about embracing traditional culture. Embrace and openly discuss these issues.

Lack of trust

Without a trusting relationship between a youth and an adult, it is unlikely that engagement will occur. Establishing trust can be challenging given the stereotypes that both adults and youth hold about each other. The stronger the relationships between youth and adults, the more likely youth are to accept and commit to greater challenges and opportunities.

Youth's individual histories

Respect and honour individual histories. Many of the youth engaged will have suffered abuse and trauma in their past. Some youth may need an opportunity to receive support regarding their victimization and healing before they are able to develop these relationships. Embrace and encourage them to make positive changes, acknowledge positive changes they have made, and recognize their ideas.



engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

3.2 DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING YOUTH

Deaf and hard of hearing young people are innovative, resilient and communicatively versed. They work twice as hard as hearing youth, to challenge the misconceptions that face them. They can do everything hearing youth can do, they just do it differently.

The Canadian Association of the Deaf recognizes a person to be deaf when that person has little or no functional hearing and depends upon visual rather than auditory communication; including Sign language, lip-reading, speech-reading, and reading and writing. Auditory means of communication includes voice, hearing, and hearing aids and devices.

The Canadian Association of the Deaf considers that 1 in 25 Canadians have "impaired hearing." Deafness is a high-percentage disability in Canada's First Nations communities; one study has estimated that 25 percent of First Nations people have some degree of hearing loss.

Deaf and hard of hearing community members are just like hearing people but with different needs, they are not disabled just uniquely-abled. Creating a space that is inclusive and considerate is easily accomplished by taking into account some specific considerations.

Common misconceptions and stereotypes

Deaf and hard of hearing young people are often faced with prejudice and discrimination. The community works against sometimes medieval like stereotypes and it's important to educate yourself on what this community works against.

By acknowledging and making yourself aware of the misconceptions you can begin to shift your perspective, and you will be more likely to create a safe and inviting environment for deaf and hard of hearing young people to engage in youth-adult and peer to peer partnerships.

- they are difficult to work with
- they are lazy and don't try
- they always angry
- they are incapable of doing anything on our own
- being quiet means they are loners
- they will never be successful
- they are emotionless
- they all dream of being able to have hearing abilities

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Special considerations and engagement tips

- Book a translator. The first step to meaningful and practical engagement is having the basics for communication. Don't assume they will bring their own translator to functions and make sure that you have budgeted for it.
- Find out the best mode of communication at every stage of the process; Email, texting, video conferencing with a translator, paper note sharing in person. Be mindful to the young person's preferences and have options.
- One of the first steps to engaging a young person who is deaf or hard of hearing is understanding their specific needs, strengths and potential contributions. There are varying abilities within multiple classifications of deaf or hard of hearing. For example some young people can speak but have different hearing abilities; others might be able to hear at varying levels but have unique speaking abilities.
- Deaf and hard of hearing individuals make up a community and therefore have its own culture. Some hearing people belong to multiple communities and identify with multiple cultures, this is the same in the deaf and hard of hearing community; don't assume that being a part of this particular community defines them.
- Deaf and hard of hearing community members usually have to clearly define their needs in order to participate in hearing activities. To meaningfully engage a young person make sure that you take the initiative to engage in a conversation about what that young person needs to successfully and comfortably participate in and authentically contribute to the meeting and partnership.
- There are a variety of classifications of sign language and it's important that the interpreter is using the same classification as the young person. If you have multiple interpretations ensure that they are all signing the same language.
- An important practice with all young people but especially with the Deaf and hard of hearing community is to not make assumptions; about the level of hearing; preferences of communication; their specific needs and their state of well being. Instead, try to create an environment of options that will support all the knowledge sharing opportunities.
- Be aware that when using a translator there is going to be a delay in time. Oral speaking happens at a more rapid pace and the speaker will most likely be finished before the translator is done signing. They aren't making things up, it's important to acknowledge and be mindful of the delay. Build in the extra time into the agenda or meeting length.

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- Make sure that the sightlines of participants are clear. Deaf and hard of hearing youth will need to see the translator, or need to see the mouth of the speaker, and some will need to visually go back and forth between the translator and speaker. It's very helpful if people stand up with they speak so visual clarity is guaranteed.
- When hearing people are learning to speak, read and write we all progress at different speeds, levels and ages, this is no different in the the deaf and hard of hearing community. Try to understand what level of knowledge you are engaging with and practice quality Youth Engagement strategies in terms of making the meeting and its contents accessible to all young people.
- The majority of the community usually resides in an urban environment so services are easier to access. The area or building where the majority of the services are provided tends to be a safe and natural gathering place for community members and is a great place to start gathering more information and engaging the community.
- If you are going to use a PowerPoint or video or in some way have to dim the lights, make sure that the deaf and hard of hearing members can still see the translator. If you obstruct their visual to the translator it would be like playing the video without sound for hearing participants.
- Be confident, collaboratively identify the needs and potential contributions a deaf or hard of hearing individual can make on a proactive basis. Doing so creates cultural safety within the partnership/group and provides comfort and clarity on roles and contributions.



- Avoid saying “never mind” or “tell you later” or “hold on,” to deaf and hard of hearing participants. It’s frustrating for them to get the information at a later time and it feeds into feelings of isolation. It also takes away from time spent on building relationships in the here and now; take the time and like other youth engagement principles, make sure that all participants are caught up, are comfortable with the information presented and have the opportunity to process the information and be an active participant. They work against exclusion and isolation particularly when it comes to participating with hearing individuals.

engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

3.3 NEWCOMER YOUTH

Newcomer youth bring a unique and powerful global perspective to the youth engagement process. They are sometimes referred to as Newcomer youth because it is an inclusive of categories of people living in our communities that may not fit under the classification of “immigrant or refugee.” B.C. welcomes approximately 40,000 new immigrants each year, and approximately one in six are youth.

Newcomer youth have come to Canada for many different reasons and from many different living conditions; these journeys are a part of the youth’s identity and understanding their journey is crucial to engaging them in a socially and culturally considerate way.

The Newcomer community is unique, rich and multifaceted and we must honour each individual and their specific contributions to the community; understanding that different cultures have different needs. Newcomer youth hold strong values with regards to family, history, and language.

Acknowledging the diversity of the demographic is important but the exploration into the uniqueness of each individual story is the process that begins your journey of meaningful engagement. Incorporating cultural perspectives into the engagement process itself can add a richness, different perspectives, and more meaningful outcomes.

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Common misconceptions and stereotypes

Newcomer youth often face discrimination. It's important to be alert to the existence of these misconceptions, acknowledge them and begin to unlearn these stereotypes within the youth-adult partnerships. We all hold some level of misunderstanding and the engagement process is a great opportunity to use their experiences, knowledge and perspective to re-educate ourselves.

Be open-minded, be honest about your assumptions and challenge your way of knowing.

- That they are a burden on society
- That they need to be saved and they need to be pitied
- That they are uneducated and all poor
- They don't pay taxes and steal Canadians jobs
- They are terrorists and intruders
- They are stupid and can't speak English
- They are not Canadian



Special considerations and engagement tips

Building upon the strategies and practices of engaging youth already stated in the resource guide, below are some additional considerations and strategies to create an environment that is open, inclusive and culturally competent.

- **Learn the different ways cultures greet one another.** Do they engage with one another in a specific way? Do men and women greet each other differently? Is there something you can do to include the greeting in the opening of the meeting?
- **Avoid generalizations.** Not every immigrant and refugee is the same, even if they come from the same country. Everyone comes with a different experience and take the time to find out what that experience is.
- **Do not lay tragedy or pity onto a young person's story.** Avoid saying things like, "Oh that is so terrible." That is their life you are talking about and it can be aggravating and insulting. It also puts you in a position of judgement; be open and understanding.
- **Consider the different roles they have and the responsibilities they hold.** They may play complex roles within the family system taking on more responsibility than your average Canadian youth; in charge of paying and processing bills, buying groceries and securing housing and employment.

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- **Go to the youth!** Some immigrant and refugee youth have had traumatic experiences with governments and organizations and systems, to create an inviting environment find out where the youth already gather and consider holding your meeting there. Be aware of additional steps you might have to take to build safety and trusting relationships with youth from other cultures.
- **Contact the active young leaders that already exist in the community.** Invest in the relationship with that leader and consider having them as a project partner. They can help inform you of practical engagement strategies for engaging the local newcomer youth community and help ensure that youth participate.
- **What time of year is it?** Many religious, spiritual and cultural calendars are very different than the western calendar. Some youth may be culturally active and it can affect their ability to participate and effect how you organize the gathering. For example, some youth may be participating in Ramadan, so it would be important and respectful to have the food and refreshments in a separate room.
- **What are the barriers and divides that are present because of the Canadian Immigration System?** Youth come to Canada in different capacities and categories, these systematic separations can cause wedges between communities. Be aware of the processes and understanding of the divides and stress they can cause for young people. Immigrant and Refugee settlement programs cultural associations can often assist you in understanding the experiences and behaviours of people coming into Canada from other cultures.
- **Lost in translation.** Some words and phrases person; we are all human beings first.
- **Find out who is coming.** To implement special considerations you need to know the backgrounds of the young people attending. Ask questions, seek more information and have a sense of humour.
- **Talk about it.** In the forming phases of the youth – adult partnerships, consider facilitating an open dialogue where participants speak of where they come from, their traditions, and how their culturalfor them. Mentor this behaviour by thanking each participant for their perspectives, and helping the group celebrate the strength their cultural diversity bring to the partnership.perspectives may contribute or be a challenge



engaging youth from diverse backgrounds

3.4 YOUTH IN GOVERNMENT CARE



As of April 2011, there were 8330 children and youth in government care in British Columbia. Notwithstanding that children in care have considerable strengths, they are also among the most vulnerable children. They are not a homogeneous group. They come from diverse backgrounds and have varied strengths and needs like all other young people. Some have spent their whole lives in Canada, while others are new immigrants who come from quite different cultural contexts. There are youth who are Aboriginal, may speak English as a second language, and many young people with special learning needs. Approximately 35% of young people in care are involved with the Youth Justice System and 53% are Aboriginal. Youth in care are four times more likely to have a mental health disorder and 51% are identified as special needs.²³

Most young people in care have experienced some form of trauma which can include things such as: exposure to prenatal toxins such as drugs and alcohol, neglect, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. These are experiences that can actually alter cognitive development and increase instances of aggression, non-compliance and poor decision making. Such problems lead children in care to be more at risk than those who have never been in care. These problems "increase the risk of poor long-term outcomes, such as low educational attainment levels and inability to form healthy social relationships."²⁴

While the statistics and information provided above are certainly concerning, it is equally important to note that many young people in care are doing well and are able to overcome challenges. Evidence from around the world speaks to the fact that children should not be viewed as helpless recipients of services, but as citizens with strengths and a capacity to overcome challenges when provided with the necessary supports and services.

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Special considerations and engagement tips

- **Diversity of Experience.** Be mindful of young people's diverse experiences. It is important to recognize that youth in care have historically had little involvement in the decisions that affect their lives; therefore, education about the right to participate can often bring up discussion about times when that hasn't been the case.
- **Stigma.** Youth in and from government care face stigma about being in care. Young people have shared that their peers and adults in society assume things about youth in and from care including: being "troubled", being "problem youth", criminals, just a statistic, not able to function in society, having mental health and addiction issues, etc. Many youth will not talk about their care experience with others to voice this stigma. This social stigma can sometimes prevent young people from recognizing the amazing and unique personalities, accomplishments, skills, talents, background and cultures.
- **Culture.** Children and youth in and from care have a fundamental need and right to be rooted in their culture and traditions. Please also refer to the section on engaging aboriginal youth.
- **Triggers.** Be aware of what situations, scenarios or actions may trigger personal reactions that may interfere with a young person's ability to participate.
- **Learning Needs.** Many young people in care have different learning needs. Compared to other young people in BC, youth in care are four times more likely than children who have never been in care to have a "serious physical or mental health condition or disability, including Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder, addictions, learning disabilities, depression, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia".²⁵

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3.5 LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDERED, QUEER/QUESTIONING, AND TWO SPIRITED YOUTH (LGBTQ2S)

LGBTQ2S youth offer a diverse and unique view of our world and communities. They offer a perspective unseen by most and challenge us to question our learned teachings, prejudices, experiences and our ideas around societal “norms”. The LGBTQ2S community is part of a fluid spectrum, rather than just a black and white picture, comprising of folk whose gender expression and sexual orientation are varied, interwoven and at times complex.

The term LGBTQ2S stands for:

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is physically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay: Refers to a man who is physically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other men.

Bisexual: “A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.”²⁶

Transgender: includes those who's gender identification doesn't fit in with societal norms of male sex/gender and female sex/gender. This includes drag queens, transvestites, cross-dressers and/or androgynous folk. A transsexual person may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. The gender that one identifies with doesn't always match their biological sex and is not always clearly male or female. “Intersexed people have sexual anatomy that is not clearly male or female but may include aspects of both male and female definitions”.²⁷

Queer/Questioning:

Queer is a negative term that has been reclaimed and repurposed to a positive one, it is a representation of those affected by homophobia and heterosexism, refusing to conform to the patriarchal, colonial system of gender and sexuality. Questioning refers to those who are still questioning what they identify with in terms of gender and/or sexuality.

2Spirited:

“Two-Spirit” was translated from the Ojibway word ‘niizh maleitoag’ and was coined during the 3rd annual First Nations Gay and Lesbian conference in Winnipeg in 1990. Not all First Nations who are LGBTQ2S identify as two spirit. It's a term that grasps the many diverse traditional roles of gender and sexuality as a part of a fluid spectrum. For two spirited folk, the term reflects their identity within the community as those with two spirits within one body, both masculine and feminine. It's a term that is used to express one's sexuality, but also their gender and/or societal roles within traditional community practices. For some two-spirited people the term represents their distinct experiences and culture as First Nations, the loss of respected traditions through the impacts of colonization and the unique way that culture and gender are tied together.²⁸

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Common misconceptions and stereotypes

Don't automatically assume the youth is LGBTQ2S by the way they dress or act or are "identifiable by stereotypical mannerisms or characteristics. They should also avoid the assumption that all LGBTQ2S people have similar life experiences or share a common sense of community".²⁹

Gender is generally viewed as a social concept and the roles we play within that structure. Sex, on the other hand, is often associated with the physical body, the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish females from males.



Cultural considerations when engaging LGBTQ2S youth

It is important to remember that there were always LGBTQ2S people in our communities and many times revered for being a balanced representation of both sexes and genders. Two-Spirited folk were revered for being powerful and essential to the community structure, providing a balanced perspective of both genders. Traditionally two-spirited folk held special roles in the community/nation and honoured as healers, ceremony leaders, traditional namers, clairvoyants, crafts people, mediators, as well as keepers of traditional songs and stories.

There have been many intergenerational impacts inflicted upon First Nations communities through residential schools. In these schools, children were many times physically, sexually, mentally and emotionally abused, especially if they spoke their language or practiced their traditions. This has impacted communities to this day and has broken down the traditional teachings and integrated a Western, Christian world view. Because of this, many Two-spirited people have lost their respected roles within their communities and have been outcast, forcing them to move to larger cities to seek refuge and acceptance. These youth many times are over represented in the foster care system and considered at risk youth.

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Special considerations and engagement tips

Creating a safe environment where the youth feels comfortable to share their stories and knowledge without fear of harassment or discrimination.

This includes:

- Have a clear and consistent set of rules that draw boundaries of behavior and respect, creating a safe and protected space for all.
- The use of proper gender pronouns that the youth identifies with.
- Put up posters showing racially and ethnically diverse, same-sex couples or families LGBTQ friendly stickers and symbols posted in offices or doors (e.g., safe zonestickers, rainbow flag, etc.)
- Providing at least one universal, gender inclusive or gender neutral restroom, so that people are not faced with the issue of choosing the right or wrong bathroom.

- Providing LGBTQ-specific media, such as this resource guide, local or national magazines or newsletters. Post appropriate resource information and activities. Encourage joining the LGBTQ2S Community of Practice at prismcop.ning.com ³⁰
- Becoming an ally to LGBTQ2S. An ally is someone who fits into a certain group of privilege within the societal structure and works alongside those who suffer from the oppression from that privileged group/society. "If I don't take an overt, intentional, active position against racism and against homophobia I will replicate them" ³¹



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3.6 YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

It is important to recognize that children and youth with special needs have the same rights as all other children and efforts must be made to ensure that the necessary action is taken to enable them to realise their rights and fulfil their potential.³² This means that children and youth with special needs have the same right as other children and youth to be involved in decision-making. Children and youth with special needs also have the right to be provided with age- and disability-appropriate supports to exercise these rights.³³

The phrase 'children with special needs' is often used interchangeably with 'children with disabilities.' For the purpose of the resource guide, children with special needs refers to children and youth up to the age of 19 years who require significant additional educational, medical/health and social/ environmental support — beyond that required by children in general — to enhance or improve their health, development, learning, quality of life, participation and community inclusion.³⁴

Children with special needs is also meant to include children with significant limitations in age-appropriate activities at home, school and in their communities, in one or more of the following areas:

- cognition and learning (e.g., intellectual disability, learning disability);
- movement and mobility (e.g., physical impairment resulting in need to use a wheelchair);
- sensory domains (e.g., visual or hearing impairments, including those who are deaf, deafblind and blind);

- interpersonal interaction and relationships (e.g., social, emotional and/or behavioural challenges);
- general daily tasks and demands (e.g., activities of daily living such as self-care)
- community, social and civic life

Although in general, young people's participation is increasing, young people with special needs are less likely to be involved than their counterparts and it is unclear to what extent young people with complex special needs or communication impairments are included in engagement activities. Often, adults may have formed assumptions and beliefs about the capacity of disabled young people to participate and the focus may be more on the young person's impairments and not on the real barrier which is the need for adults to become more open and creative in terms of how to meaningfully engage youth with an array of special needs. Adults often demonstrate confusion about participation should or could mean for young people with special needs. There can be concerns about competence, misunderstandings about abilities to participate, coupled with unease about the interpretation of young people's views. It is wrong and unfair to refer to a person as lacking competence or capacity for making decisions.

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There is no relationship between the age of a young person and the criteria for determining competence. Assessing competence of a child or youth in a standardized way is not possible and should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and considering context. There are a number of factors that contribute to a child or youth being considered capable and these include:

- the language spoken in the home
- opportunities to practice decision making, and;
- personal experience in the situation that requires a decision or action.

For children and youth with special needs, these factors are confounded by the assumption that they are not capable because of their 'disability' and they typically have few opportunities to be involved in decisions affecting them compared to other children and youth.

Engagement and participation is made more difficult by the challenges of multiple communication methods used by children and youth with special needs (e.g., augmentative communication devices, interpreters). In addition, the assumption about a young person's competence creates further exclusion for children and youth with special needs as they often face attitudinal and cultural barriers to their participation in decision-making.

Special considerations and engagement tips:

Children and youth with special needs may have difficulty with engagement because they are not used to having choices or making decisions on their own. However, some advocates feel that young people with special needs could participate more in decision making if there were sufficient funding, skilled staff, and time for relationship building to ensure that the child or youth with special needs was fully informed and involved.³⁵

- It is important to remember that young people with special needs do have strong views about the society they live in, how they are treated, services they receive, their education, health and leisure. The responsibility lies with the adults to create an environment and culture that creatively explores an array of methods and approaches to effectively and meaningfully engage youth with special needs.
- Youth with special needs are not a homogenous group and there is a need to take an individualized approach with attention placed on communication methods.
- Families play a vital role in enabling their children's participation.
- Service providers should formally assess children's functional abilities and activity preferences, family engagement in social and recreational activities, and family activity preferences and discuss these aspects of children's participation with families.
- Preparing youth with special needs to participate takes time and creativity to determine the best approach
- Explore who is best placed to communicate with youth with special needs and welcome adult supports who can assist the young person to participate

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3.7 YOUNG PARENTS

When thinking of young parents, it is not uncommon to be influenced by assumptions and stereotypes. These assumptions may not be directly linked to youth but may in fact be the result of other circumstances such as poverty, stigma, and lack of access to support and health services. It is often not the stereotypical image of a teenage single mother and can equally include a married couple in their early 20s. Many young parents may be single but this is not always the case. Parenthood may or may not have been planned and many of the young parents may have been involved in the social services system and may have been in government care. There are increased health risks such as low birth weight and premature births. Youth mothers are more likely to drink and smoke during pregnancy and less likely to breastfeed. However, they are more likely to live in deprived areas so these risks may be linked more to poverty and disadvantage than youth itself. Young parents have traditionally been hard to reach and it is important to recognize that youth with parenting responsibilities often need support to help them participate in a meaningful way.

Special considerations and engagement tips

- Although young parents do face new challenges and difficulties, they often also feel more confident, more adult and more responsible.
- Knowing the parents' circumstance can be useful in identifying what support they may need
- Young parents may come with negative experiences or expectations of the system and the services
- Babysitting and children's schedules need to be considered when choosing meeting times and length.

- Consider creating a policy whereby youth requiring child care are provided additional financial support to pay for babysitters or be allowed to bring their children with them to meetings.
- If youth bring their children to meetings be clear on the level of supervision required of the group and provide food and breaks that support the young parent's ability to complete both roles.



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3.8 HOMELESS YOUTH

Youth homelessness refers to youth who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness or caught in a cycle of homelessness for whatever reason. This includes the many homeless youth (some say as high as 80%) who don't live on the street and who are among the hidden homeless. The age definition of youth ranges from as young as 12 to as old as 29 years old. Most often, however, youth are defined as 16 to 24 years old. They are not living with a family in a home and they are not under the care of child protection agencies. Often they are defined as living in a cycle of homelessness which can mean being temporarily sheltered or living in crowded or unsafe conditions. The vast majority of homeless

youth have not completed high school which limits opportunities to secure training and employment as well as accessible, affordable and suitable housing. Many have experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, violence and substance abuse, mental illness and family instability. Homeless youth are more likely to get sick and die on the streets. They often perceive violence as a means of resolving conflict, threatening harm to themselves and others, and leading to involvement with the justice system. Aboriginal youth are over-represented in the homeless population in some parts of Canada. Many homeless youth may have lived in government care. The longer youth remain homeless, the worse their health and life chances become." Like youth anywhere, anxiety is often

reported as a debilitating condition. Living on the street is very stressful. Many service providers reported that street-involved youth have often left home lives that are more unstable and complicated than the street, which is in itself an incredibly unstable and complicated environment.

Youth, however are incredibly resilient. They survive on the streets through very creative means. They build street families, develop street money-making economies, street housing and street routines, all while being marginalized, harassed and excluded.



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Special considerations and engagement tips

- Youth entrenched in the street culture have not always learned mainstream norms so may require mentoring, coaching and support.
- Where possible, do what you can to help meet their basic and immediate needs. For example, purchase extra food for the meeting so that they have something to take with them at the end.
- Assist with transportation by offering to pick them up and drive them to a shelter afterwards or providing bus tickets for local transportation.
- Homeless youth demonstrate difficulties in many aspects of their life; thus, a holistic and individualized approach is required to reduce barriers.

3.9 YOUTH IN CUSTODY

In BC, youth are ordered to custody by a youth justice court judge and are either subject to a warrant of remand (awaiting trial or sentence) or a warrant of committal (serving a custody sentence). Additionally, youth can be brought to a youth custody centre following police arrest but prior to appearance in court (pre-court detention) or in rare circumstances on an Immigration hold. Due to the nature of the service and the legal mandate to accept youth, the majority of admissions to youth custody are unplanned and all are involuntary. Also, given that approximately 50% are on remand status, the length of stay is often not known as the youth may make multiple court appearances. Youth admitted on pre-court status are often admitted and released within a 24 hour period.

Being admitted to custody is an anxious time for youth. Youth in custody present with a variety of mental health, physical health, and substance abuse issues, coupled with complex histories of educational difficulties, social disconnectedness, and significant family disruption. In addition, most youth in custody have experienced some form of trauma in their lives, which impacts their ability to effectively function both in the community, and within a youth custody setting. Approximately 46% of youth admitted to custody are Aboriginal, 16% are females, 96% are predominantly English speaking, and the majority are in the 15-18 year age range.

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Common misconceptions and stereotypes

- Given their involvement with the justice system, youth can't be trusted
- Youth have no ability to manage their own behaviour
- Youth aren't connected to anyone in the community
- All they need to is to associate with a better peer group and go to school regularly
- Because youth were involuntarily admitted, they cannot voluntarily participate in youth engagement activities

Special considerations and engagement tips

- Recognize that youth come from backgrounds of trauma which may influence their perception of the world, their attitude and behaviour (e.g. triggers, lack of trust, etc.)
- Develop supportive relationships through the use of power balance, respectful communication, following through with commitments etc.
- Help youth to manage their feelings so they can participate
- Create physically and emotionally safe environments (e.g. being respectful of confidentiality and being clear regarding what information will be shared, gender specific programs for girls , etc.)
- Regularly review and post rules, rights and complaints procedures in youth friendly language
- Make the complaint process accessible and understandable
- Connect youth with advocacy supports
- Develop activities jointly with youth which promotes team building opportunities

- Ensure youth have an opportunity to participate in research activities and complete youth feedback surveys which help evaluate custody services
- Support youth to participate in the Youth Advisory/Resident Advisory meeting which are peer advocacy forums and can also give youth access to decision makers
- Demonstrate welcoming, non-judgmental and respectful interactions with the youth and their family members

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RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

BEST PRACTICES AND TOOLKITS

Being Y-AP Savvy

<http://fyi.uwex.edu/youthadultpartnership/files/2011/02/YAP-Savvy12.pdf>

Best Practices for Increasing Meaningful Youth Participation in Collaborative Team Planning

<http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/PDF/pbAMPYouthParticipation.pdf>

Conferences & Events: Children and Young People's Participation

http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/tps_conferences_full.pdf

Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers

<http://youthrelationships.org/documents/!Toolkit%20Text%20-%20English.pdf>

Handbook: Building a Culture of Participation

<http://www.healthissuescentre.org.au/documents/items/2009/07/284475-upload-00001.pdf>

Involve Youth 2: A guide to meaningful youth engagement

<http://www.toronto.ca/involveyouth/pdf/youth2inal.pdf>

Involving Children: A Guide to Engaging Children in Decision-Making

<http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/archive/2003-involving-children.pdf>

Involving Children in Decision-making

http://www.surreyca.org.uk/pdfs/cf_participation_model.pdf

Key Indicators of successful child and youth engagement in local government By Doug Ragan, Environmental Youth Alliance and Lori McNulty

http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/wuf_the_youth_friendly_city.pdf

Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People (Archived)
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CYPUCP1-PDF1.pdf>

Moving the Margins: Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Out-of-Home Care
<http://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/moving-the-margins>

Ontario Public Health Association: Youth Engagement Toolkit
<http://www.youthengagement.ca/sites/default/files/OPHAYouthEngagementToolkit-April2011.pdf>

Preventing Youth Disengagement and Promoting Engagement
<http://apo.org.au/research/preventing-youth-disengagement-and-promoting-engagement>

Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making
<http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf>

Putting Youth Engagement into Practice: A toolkit for action
http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Shared_ASP_Files/UploadedFiles/F0376D05-C471-44B3-9565-C34FA928041F_6CYMM_YouthEngagement-C31AB.pdf

Ready, Set, Engage!
http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/Res_Ready_Set_engage.pdf

Recommended Practices to Promoting the Safety and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth and Youth at Risk or Living with HIV in Child Welfare Settings
<http://www.cwla.org/newsevents/recommended-practices-youth.pdf>

So You want to Consult with Children? A Toolkit of Good Practice
http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/publications/hrbap/childconsult_toolkit.pdf

Toolkit for Youth Involvement: Engaging Youth in the Child and Family Services Review
<http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/CFSRtoolkit.pdf>

Youth Engagement Toolkit
<http://www.halifax.ca/rec/YouthEngagementToolkit.html>

GUIDELINES, STANDARDS AND STRATEGIES

Declaration of Accountability – on the ethical engagement of young people and adults in Canadian organizations
http://www.fncfcs.com/sites/default/files/docs/declaration_accountability.pdf

Practice Standards in Children’s Participation
<http://www.un-ngls.org/orf/cso/cso10/children.pdf>

Hear by Right - Standards Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People
<http://hbr.nya.org.uk/files/1-Hear%20By%20Right%202008.pdf>

The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg & The Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Centred Prairie Communities.
(2003). Youth Engagement Project
http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/ccednet/SE___YOUTH_TOOLKIT.pdf

USEFUL WEBSITES

BRITISH COLUMBIA

The McCreary Centre Society
www.mcs.bc.ca

The Society for Child and Youth
www.scyofbc.org

International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) based at the University of Victoria
<http://www.iicrd.org>

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
www.fbcyicn.ca

CANADA

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement
<http://www.engagementcentre.ca/>

Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre
<http://www.cbu.ca/crc/>

Save the Children Canada
<http://www.savethechildren.ca/>

The Canadian Coalition on the Rights of the Child
<http://www.rightsofchildren.ca/>

Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development
<http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/ourresources.html>

UNITED KINGDOM

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)
<http://www.crae.org.uk/>

Funky Dragon
<http://www.funkydragon.org>

UNITED STATES

National Youth Development Information Center
<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/index.html>

OTHER USEFUL DOCUMENTS

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