

Guidebook

Youth as Equal Partners **A Guidebook on Youth Involvement**



United Way
of America

The Way America Cares.
Community by Community.™

Youth as Equal Partners is a project of
The Mobilization for America's Children of United Way of America,
whose vision is:

To be a nation of communities where all children, youth and their families
are valued and in which they may prosper.

The vision of Youth as Equal Partners is:

To ensure that youth from all walks of life have opportunities to be equal partners
with adults in organizational governance, philanthropy, community building,
advocacy, and other important community work.

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Contents

Introducing Youth as Equal Partners	1
The Language	2
The Principle	3
The Benefits	5
Understanding the Key Components of Youth as Equal Partners	7
1. Equal Selection Process	8
2. Regard and Respect for Each Individual	10
3. Orientation and Training	11
4. Full Voting Rights	12
5. Equal Terms and Benefits	13
6. Opportunities to Assume Visible Leadership Roles	14
7. Realistic Expectations	14
8. Access to Transportation	15
9. Accessible Meeting Places and Times	15
10. Access to Necessary Resources	16
11. Participatory and Interactive Meetings	17
12. Communication with Parents and Schools	19
Developing Plans for Youth Involvement	21
1. Assessing Readiness to Involve Youth	25
2. Securing Commitments from Adults	30
3. Recruiting Youth	32
4. Providing Orientation and Training	35
5. Sharing Success Stories	37
Exploring Additional Resources	38
About the Authors	43

Introducing Youth as Equal Partners

Much is said “about and to” youth. This guidebook is designed to help organizations and communities partner “with” youth—and work with youth as equal partners.

The trend of viewing and involving youth as equal partners is beginning to take hold in cities and towns across America. Instead of adults making decisions for youth, the new paradigm is making decisions with youth. Many public and private institutions are recognizing the benefits of engaging young people as equal partners in decision-making.

Involving youth as equal partners is a very different concept than encouraging participation in traditional youth programs where adults set the agenda and expect young people to follow. In our age-segregated society, such behavior is deeply rooted. Adults are conditioned to be authority figures, with the expectation that young people will be subordinate. When youth are equal partners, a new dynamic emerges—adults show respect and share power with youth, and youth respect and share power with adults.

Youth as Equal Partners is not a stand-alone initiative for organizations to implement. Rather, it is a principle to be woven into existing work. Youth as Equal Partners is based on the belief that young people are citizens now, and not sometime in the future. It is also founded on the understanding that organizations and communities can genuinely benefit from the ideas, perspectives, skills, commitments, and connections of young people.

This guidebook is designed to provide your organization with a roadmap of how to involve youth as equal partners in all aspects of your work. It begins with a comprehensive explanation of the “equal partners” concept, and the benefits of implementing this approach. This is followed by the twelve practice-based, research-supported, key components; and, the process you can use to build equal partnerships with youth.

The latter section outlines a simple process that can help your organization discover all of the possibilities for youth involvement. It includes tools that can assess your readiness to involve young people and it walks you through the process of securing commitments from adults. It also shows you how to recruit young people, and share your success stories.

This guidebook is written with non-profit, 501(c)(3) organizations in mind. However, the information in the guidebook is applicable to any formal or informal group that seeks to involve young people as partners. The twelve key components of youth as equal partners can form a basis for youth involvement in multiple spheres of community life, including citizen action groups, public commissions, community service clubs, and so on. The possibilities for youth involvement as equal partners are endless, and this guidebook can serve as a basis to start your journey regardless of your organization’s type.

The Language

The Language

In this guide, “youth” refers to individuals 12-18 years old. Youth are distinguished from young adults, as most youth have not reached legal adulthood. The ages in this definition serve as general guidelines, and are not intended to be strict parameters. The term “young people” is also used interchangeably with youth in this guide. Both terms are acceptable and refer to the same age group.

This guide uses “youth as equal partners” to clarify the concept of young people being viewed, respected, and involved as equals.

It should be noted that the term “equal partners” does not mean that every individual shares every task in every situation. Youth as equal partners is about youth and adults having equal status, with the understanding that the distribution of the workload and/or responsibility will vary among individuals and situations.

Throughout this guidebook, there are several examples of youth involvement as equal partners. Additional examples can be found on the websites of United Way of America (<http://www.unitedway.org>), and At the Table, a national clearinghouse for youth in decision-making (<http://www.atthetable.org>).

On these websites, you’ll also have access to a complete and updated list of additional resources, online tools from national organizations, and downloadable versions of worksheets and forms used in this guide.



The Principle

The concept of equal partnership goes beyond teaching youth about decision-making and leadership skills or planning programs in which they are either participants or recipients. The aim is for young people from all backgrounds to have opportunities to be fully engaged as *real* decision-makers and leaders who have *real* impact on organizational and community development.

“Youth leadership” opportunities can generally be divided into three categories: *preparation*, *participation*, and *equal partnership*. Although young people can benefit from opportunities in all three categories, this guidebook is focused on opportunities for equal partnership. Consider these differences:

- **Preparation** aims to teach young people about leadership and to develop their confidence and skills. This can be done through youth camps, retreats, after-school activities or in-school lessons. While these experiences may inspire young people to get involved in leadership and volunteer opportunities, the primary objective is to teach them skills, and to help them discover their leadership potential. The role of adults is usually as teacher or facilitator.
- **Participation** actually involves young people in service and/or decision-making roles, often in parallel efforts to those of adults, but not with an equal status. Most youth advisory councils, youth boards, and youth grantmaking groups fall into this category. The primary objective of these opportunities is to give youth a chance to learn by doing. Youth development is often the primary goal, and community or organizational change is secondary. Although youth may have considerable influence in these opportunities, adults serve as mentors, advisors, and facilitators.
- **Equal Partnership and Power Sharing** allows youth to engage in decision-making and actions as equal partners with adults. The primary objective is community or organizational change with any learning or youth development as a positive by-product. Such opportunities give youth a chance to have their voices heard on substantive and meaningful issues, help allocate large sums of money, participate in organizational governance, etc. Since people of all ages work together to achieve a common goal, any hierarchical differences between youth and adults become blurred.¹

Historically, adults have controlled community organizations and institutions. Youth have had little or no significant voice in the decisions that affect their lives or their communities. However, this tradition is destined to change. As the authors of *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* predict:

“People born in or after 1982, the so-called millennial generation, are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent,

¹ Adapted from Pittman et al. (2001). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals*. Forum for Youth Investment.

better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. Only a few years from now, this can-do youth revolution will overwhelm the cynics and pessimists. Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged; the consequences for America are extraordinary.”²

When youth are equal partners with adults, organizations and communities benefit from their ideas, perspectives, skills, commitments, and connections. Young people are viewed and treated as real contributors. This helps them feel valued by their communities, a factor that has been identified as a critical element of healthy youth development.³

In the first two years of youth involvement efforts, the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley (serving the Salem, Oregon area) has had some exciting results. The Board of Directors added a full-voting youth member in 2000. The Youth Vision Team, a youth volunteer program, has a student leader group comprised of youth who make decisions and conduct the program’s operations: community service activities, teambuilding, leadership training, special events, volunteer recruitment, and fund distribution processes. Youth have also begun to serve on Campaign Cabinet Committees including Marketing and Days of Caring. A group of high school students involved with DECA, an Association of Marketing Students, developed a public awareness campaign for the Success By 6® initiative that had full board and staff support. High school and college students are also paid part-time United Way staff members with such duties as loaned executive, data entry, website design/maintenance, donation software file maintenance, and archival work. Future plans are to increase the number of youth on the Board of Directors, include youth as members of the adult allocations committee, and provide support for youth-led campaigns.

Put simply, involving youth as equal partners is a new way of doing business for many organizations. This philosophy means valuing and respecting young people beyond an intrinsic “future value” but as unique individuals who can make important contributions today. Equal partnerships don’t demand that new structures or initiatives be created for youth, but rather that young people be full and integral players in existing structures and opportunities.

The concept of youth as equal partners is based on the belief that young people can be involved in *all aspects* of your organization’s work. Young people can work alongside adults in multiple capacities. They can serve as full members of advisory councils, policy committees, or even the board of directors. Building these partnerships can provide tremendous practical benefits to your organization, several of which are discussed in the next section.

² Howe, N. and Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York: Vintage Books.

³ Konopka, Gisela (1973). *Requirements for the Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth*.

The Benefits

When it comes to being involved in organizational decision-making and governance, a typical and unfortunate assumption is that young people are uninterested, unprepared, and uninformed. As a result, most organizations only involve young people in minor volunteer roles or as program recipients. However, organizations all across the country are realizing that involving young people as equal partners in all aspects of their work has many practical advantages.

Involving youth as equal partners can:

- **Change the Image of Your Organization**—People under the age of 18 make up 26 percent of the population.⁴ Engaging this population may help revitalize your organization as a younger, more inclusive institution. This image can be enhanced by youth serving in prominent leadership roles such as members of the board of directors. This type of involvement also has the potential to forge a positive association between young people and your organization's brand.
- **Tap a New Pool of Potential Donors**—Teen spending alone was at a record level of \$141 billion in 2000.⁵ This disposable income coincides with the dramatic growth of young people in philanthropy. Also, research indicates that young donors will continue to be charitable givers as adults.⁶
- **Expand Your Volunteer Corps**—More than 50 percent of young people between 12-17 years of age volunteer, a higher percentage than any other age group in America.⁷ Sixty percent of teens start volunteering by the age of 14.⁸ Moreover, many young people have solid experience to help recruit, coordinate, and manage other volunteers.
- **Generate New Fundraising Strategies**—The number of approaches and avenues for raising money can be augmented by seeking input and leadership from young people, as well as all other untapped segments of the population.
- **Lend Expertise to Decisions**—Young people can contribute crucial information and offer reality checks on decisions made by your organization, including resource allocation decisions. Young people can offer a wealth of first-hand perspectives on youth development and the realities of being young, which is particularly beneficial in organizations that serve or impact young people.
- **Facilitate Long-Term Growth**—Introducing the younger generation to your mission can result in a long-term commitment to the organization. Teenage consumers consider a company's commitment to good causes second only to the quality of a product or service, ahead of price, advertising and celebrity endorsements.⁹ Involving many young people

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census

⁵ Teen Research Unlimited, Inc.

⁶ Council of Michigan Foundations (forthcoming longitudinal study at <http://www.cmif.org>)

⁷ "America's Teenage Volunteers" (1998). Independent Sector

⁸ "Trends Emerging from the National Survey of Volunteering and Giving Among Teenagers" (1996).

Independent Sector

⁹ Cone/Roper Cause-Related Teen Survey (2000).



as equal partners in your decisions and work can help forge this long-term commitment to your organization's mission.

- **Strengthen Diversity and Organizational Capacity**—Equal partnerships with young people are a natural extension of a commitment to bridge diverse sectors of communities by increasing the involvement of people from all backgrounds and walks of life. In addition to volunteer roles, young people can assume numerous roles including part-time staff, temporary summer staff, and consultants.

Although adult staff can be trained to care for adolescent clients and work in “youth-friendly” clinics, teens may still feel more comfortable discussing reproductive health issues with people their own age.

In five counties in California, a Peer Provider model has demonstrated solid results. Teens work as family planning staff, and deliver non-medical services such as health education, laboratory services, and case management including telephone follow-up. Peer Providers have the same basic training requirements and certifications, job responsibilities, pay scale, and expectations of professionalism as adult employees.

Initially, older staff members resisted the idea of teens performing the same work. Often youth workers felt they were automatically blamed for whatever problem arose. But teen staff found that once they could demonstrate their ability to do their job well, they gained the respect of the adults. Peer Providers are included in regular “all staff” meetings, and sometimes fill in for other staff in the adult family planning clinic. When Peer Providers turn 20, many move into these jobs on a permanent basis or have opportunities for career advancement to other positions such as Outreach Worker.

The evaluation of this “Wellness” Peer Provider model shows increased health visits by both males and females and continuity of care, improved birth control and condom use, and reduced pregnancy rates over time. A higher proportion of female clients returned for one or more visits (64 percent) as compared to the control group (48 percent). The five county clinics reached a population of teenagers that represented the racial and ethnic diversity of their communities.

- **Promote Intergenerational Collaboration**—A powerful factor in determining the well-being of young people is the presence of parents and adults who are engaged in teenagers' lives.¹⁰ Moreover, adults also benefit from partnering with youth by feeling more committed to the organization and being more attuned to programming issues.¹¹

- **Increase Visibility of Your Organization**—Articulate, knowledgeable young spokespeople can capture the attention of the news media, sometimes more than well-recognized community leaders. Also, by setting an example, your organization can be a catalyst in supporting and sustaining equal partnerships with young people among other organizations throughout the community.

After reading these practical benefits of involving young people, it's easy to see that working with young people can have powerful implications for your organization and its ability to fulfill its mission and goals. These benefits are the potential cumulative effect of working with youth as equal partners in various facets of your organization.

The purpose of outlining these benefits is to demonstrate that young people can bring as much to the table as adults. As with adults, young people will have their own unique strengths. Similarly, as with adults, not every young person will continue to volunteer and work with your organization long-term.

Practice and empirical research have shown that young people are more likely to significantly contribute and remain connected when they are treated as equal partners and when they see that their involvement has a meaningful impact.

¹⁰ National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (1997). JAMA, 278 (10), pp. 823-32

¹¹ Zeldin et al. (2000). *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*, University of Wisconsin-Extension and Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.

Understanding the Key Components of Youth as Equal Partners

Equal partnerships don't just happen instantly. They are the result of careful consideration of certain key components that ensure that *all* individuals are respected and meaningfully engaged.

This section highlights twelve necessary elements of youth involvement that are grounded in good practice, and supported by research.¹² They are interrelated, and contribute to effective, sustainable, and beneficial equal partnerships. The twelve components are as follows:

- 1) Equal Selection Process
- 2) Regard and Respect for Each Individual
- 3) Orientation and Training
- 4) Full Voting Rights
- 5) Equal Terms and Benefits
- 6) Opportunities to Assume Visible Leadership Roles
- 7) Realistic Expectations
- 8) Access to Transportation
- 9) Accessible Meeting Places and Times
- 10) Access to Necessary Resources
- 11) Participatory and Interactive Meetings
- 12) Communication with Parents and Schools

The purpose of these components is to help your organization partner with young people. However, after reviewing these key components, you may also re-think the way you work with adults. Several organizations that have gone through the process of including young people have had that experience. One example is National 4-H Council, which completely restructured its Board of Trustees to increase participation and interaction at their meetings to accommodate young people, but found out that everyone appreciated the new meeting style.

These components are outlined in a question-and-answer format. Read through them and think about how they could be implemented in your organization.

¹² Zeldin et al. (2000). *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*, University of Wisconsin-Extension and Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.

Key Component I

Equal Selection Process

The vision of *Youth as Equal Partners* is that young people from all walks of life have opportunities to be equal partners with adults. Opportunities should not be limited to young people who have previously demonstrated superior leadership skills or who are popular in their peer groups.

The goal in Hampton, Virginia is that any young person who wants to be involved in decision-making in the neighborhood, the school system, or local government has that opportunity.

One well-functioning structure in Hampton is the seven-member Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, two of whom are youth. With a youth-friendly agenda, and staff experienced in collaborating with young people, this Board has a solid track record.

Also, the Hampton City Neighborhood Commission has two seats reserved for youth and meets monthly. Each neighborhood also has a local youth leadership group which attracts people as young as ten to undertake a variety of neighborhood projects. Moreover, the local youth leadership groups provide opportunities for many more young people to be community architects, including those not affiliated with service clubs and youth organizations. The City's Planning Department has two teens on its payroll as permanent part-time employees. These city planners conduct surveys and feasibility studies.

National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC), a Minnesota-based non-profit organization, has a minimum requirement of three youth on its board of directors. At least two board members are required to have served on NYLC's Youth Project Team, a group of youth volunteers that works with and advises NYLC staff. The other youth board member was selected in a similar manner to adult members. This arrangement allows young people to apply for board positions without imposing any requirement on them that is not imposed on adults.

What about requiring participation in our youth advisory council as a prerequisite to equal involvement with adults? You may already have an established youth program, or a youth advisory council. These youth groups may include many interested young people who could be involved in traditionally adult-only decision-making structures in your organization. However, it is important not to limit involvement in these structures to young people already involved in your organization.

Following the equal partners principle, youth should be recruited and selected on the same basis as adults. Some organizations require young board members or volunteers to have previously served on a youth advisory council or other adjunct body. In many of these organizations, the adjunct youth body elects one or two of its members to serve on the "adult board." Another common "model" is to recruit only young people who have previously been through some sort of "youth leadership training." Although these criteria may appear to make sense at the outset, they tend to violate the principle of youth as equal partners, since adults are generally not required to meet such stipulations. They also tend to limit opportunities to young people who can make a "double commitment," or a commitment to two groups at once, and reflect a false generalization that young people need more training than adults.

If your organization already has young people on your committees who were selected according to the models

described above, consider inviting additional youth to the table who are selected because they bring unique experiences, viewpoints, perspectives, or backgrounds that can help your organization accomplish its goals.

Youth involved in student councils would probably be the most effective, right?

Not necessarily. It's beneficial not to limit involvement to: (1) those already connected to youth boards and are popular or influential with their peers, (2) only to student council members or (3) National Honor Society students. Too often, the only young people who are ever asked to serve in leadership roles with adults are young people who stand out because of prior achievements. Student

council members are often recruited because they're seen as good representatives of their peers. A young person does not have to be high achieving or influential with his or her peers to contribute in significant and meaningful ways to your organization. In fact, it may be beneficial to involve young people who have experienced challenges or problems that your organization is trying to address.

Shouldn't the primary focus be on teaching youth how to be good decision-makers?

No. As stated earlier in this guidebook, the purpose of equal partnership opportunities is to effect community or organizational change. Some organizations involve young people in decision-making and leadership roles as partners with adults for the primary reason that they want those young people to learn about volunteering, decision-making or leadership. An adult's desire to "teach" does not necessarily equate to a young person's desire to serve. Research on youth development clearly indicates that young people involved in traditionally adult-only leadership roles do learn valuable skills. But, such learning or development is best viewed as a by-product of involvement.

Why does this matter? Because young people who have been involved in community and organizational leadership roles consistently state that the motive for involving youth makes a big difference in the way they are treated. Adults who see youth involvement primarily as a "growth experience" are more likely to treat them in ways that are often perceived as condescending or patronizing. Conversely, when adults see youth for what they have to offer, they are more likely to treat them as legitimate and respected partners.

What about youth involvement as a funding requirement?

An increasing number of funders require youth involvement on planning and advisory committees for grants. Although these requirements have spurred many organizations to begin involving young people, some organizations see them as just another hurdle before they can obtain the funding. Expediency is likely to be chosen over effectiveness in these situations. Young people who are recruited and involved simply for this reason are less likely to have a positive experience, especially when these key components are absent.



Key Component 2

Regard and Respect for Each Individual

In today's society, young people are isolated and often unfairly stereotyped. When soliciting a young person's opinion, there is often an assumption that the individual is speaking on behalf of all young people. In reality, of course, no individual young person speaks for all young people.

Is there really such a thing as a single "youth perspective"?

No. It is unfortunate that youth are often perceived to be one monolithic group of people that thinks and behaves alike. However, youth are as diverse as adults in their thoughts, opinions, experiences, skills, and backgrounds. No two young people are exactly alike. This is an important concept to understand, and is precisely the reason why it's best not to recruit young people to be "youth representatives." Rather, your organization will benefit most if it recruits young people for what they bring to your organization as individuals, whether it is a unique perspective, experience(s), talent(s), energy, passion, or commitment. These contributions may be associated with or considered a result of being young; but they reflect individual opinions and ideas.

How can we avoid stereotyping youth?

Young people are far less likely to be active with your organization if they continually hear stereotypical comments such as, "Today's youth are lazy," or "Kids just don't care about helping other people anymore." Some young community leaders encourage adults to mentally substitute the word "black" or "Hispanic" for "youth" before they say or write something that may be perceived as a biased statement.

You may wish to incorporate youth/adult partnership training as you work to involve youth. Such workshops are designed to confront negative stereotypes and unspoken concerns about young people. These trainings are more likely to be successful if they permeate the organization from the boardroom on down. For example, at a major public library in Chicago, such training included everyone from the security guards to the friendly faces behind the reference desk.

Broader diversity training for staff, board members, and volunteers can be another worthwhile investment - especially if the trainings go beyond the issue of age to include such factors as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious background, personality type, etc.

Regardless of the approach that your organization chooses, your efforts to build equal partnerships with young people will be much more successful if you resist the cultural tendency to stereotype and unfairly group young people.

Key Component 3

Orientation and Training

Orientation is key to making sure that everyone, young and old, feels comfortable and confident in his or her role.

What should the orientation cover?

Many organizations assume that volunteers have prior experience or a basic understanding of such things as Robert's Rules of Order, balance sheets, etc. These assumptions are not only problematic for young people new to your organization, but also for some adults. One veteran board member of a YWCA was once asked, "What is a 501(c)(3) anyway?" An adult who had served on the board for more than three years raised this question!

The orientation can cover everything from the history of your organization to how to read budget reports. For young people and adults new to this type of volunteer service, some skills training on interpersonal workings in small to medium-sized groups may be helpful. The best way to know what type of orientation new members need is to ask. Ask all new volunteers, regardless of age, what they are comfortable with, what they know, and on what things they need further training. Then, gear the orientation toward those needs. The section **Developing Plans for Youth Involvement** provides a more in-depth discussion on this topic.

We just send out information to volunteers between meetings. Is this an adequate way to disseminate information?

No. Effective communication goes beyond sending members something to read before meetings. Communication is best when it is interactive. Do your volunteer committees encourage questions, new ideas, and informal discussion? Is there an accessible staff person whom volunteers can call between meetings for further clarification and questions? Meeting minutes and financial reports can be confusing even to experienced volunteers. If you are going to partner with young people, especially those that have never been involved in a formal organization, you want to make sure that somebody is available to answer questions and provide informational support on an on-going basis. This may be a staff person, or a volunteer committee member who serves as a mentor to new members.

The section **Exploring Additional Resources**, found at the end of this guidebook, provides contact information for several organizations that offer volunteer orientation and training materials.

"It doesn't matter if it's an old person or a young person; it doesn't matter if the person is new to your organization or not; it doesn't even matter if the person has served on a board before or not. Each board is different, and everybody should have board orientation to learn the culture of the board they're about to serve on."

—Berit Lakey, BoardSource

Orientation and Training

Key Component 4

Full Voting Rights

An equal partnership means that adults and young people have an equal vote on your organization's boards, councils, and committees whenever legally possible. Anything less is unacceptable.

Is it legal for youth to vote on a board of directors?

Not in all states, and with certain limitations in others. In seven states, it is illegal for people under the age of 18 to cast a vote on boards of directors of 501(c)(3) organizations. These states are Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Utah. They can, however, still serve on the board in a near-equal capacity, but their vote does not carry any legal weight. Also, they can still serve and vote on board subcommittees and other volunteer panels (allocations, etc.), as long as those groups do not make binding organizational policy. If you are in one of the states where it is illegal for minors under the age of 18 to vote on boards of directors, it's always best to inform young people up-front of the limitations of their participation.

The Caring Rivers United Way in Elk River, Minnesota demonstrates how youth as equal partners can significantly impact organizational development. This small United Way is composed of one board of directors that directly oversees virtually all aspects of the organization's work. The board has 14 members, three of whom are youth under the age of 18. Youth members have worked alongside adult members to raise and allocate funds, hire a part-time executive director, and make organizational policy. Young people have been full-voting board members in the Caring Rivers United Way for over seven years. As one adult board member commented, "We wouldn't be able to do all that we do without the young people there helping us."

Three states, Michigan, Minnesota, and New York, allow voting by youth board members with certain limitations. In Michigan, boards may include members who are 16 and 17 years old as long as the number does not exceed more than half of the total number of directors required for a quorum. An organization incorporated in Michigan must also state the total number of 16 or 17-year-old board members in its charter. In Minnesota, there is no minimum age for board members, except that a majority must be adults. In New York, board members must be at least 18 years of age, except organizations with educational or youth development missions may include one or more board members at least 16 years of age, depending upon the exact nature of the organization.

Most states are silent on the issue of whether minors can legally serve as full voting members. In such states, issues of contract law and liability come into play if a young person casts a deciding vote in the case of a tie. Tie votes are usually rare, as many non-profit boards make decisions by consensus. However, if youth are involved on a 501(c)(3) board of directors in a so-called "silent" state, it's usually advised that the organization not count the votes of young people if their votes would change the outcome.

A full discussion of legal issues surrounding so-called "silent" states is beyond the scope of this guidebook. Each state's laws have a different set of nuances that come into play. Check with an attorney experienced in non-profit law. BoardSource (formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards) can also be of assistance with this issue. Also, a 64-page publication by Youth on Board (see **Exploring Additional Resources**) entitled, *Your Guide to Youth Board Involvement and the Law* covers these legal issues more in-depth, including issues related to contracts and liability, and the law regarding age requirements in the state of New York.

The board of directors is the only structure where legal issues related to voting might come into play. Your organization likely has many other committees on which young people can volunteer to serve with full voting rights.

Key Component 5

Equal Terms and Benefits

Sometimes youth are brought to the table on different terms than adults. This can lead to tension between the two groups, especially if the terms impede full participation by a young person.

We want to involve many young people. Should we limit the terms of youth on our board to one year?

No. Wanting to involve as many young people as possible is a noble goal. However, it is self-defeating if it limits the ability of those young people already involved to contribute equally. Typically, it takes about a year for young people to become completely comfortable with the dynamics of a formal group like a board of directors. Limiting involvement to one-year (when adults have longer terms) limits a board's ability to receive maximum benefit from a young person's contributions.

Should we compensate volunteers?

If adults are given stipends or per diems for participation, young people ought to receive the same. Some organizations don't pay young people for their time when they do for adults. The justification may be that "this is a great learning experience for the kids." However, that attitude usually leads to poor retention and high turnover among young volunteers and staff. It also violates the principle of young people as equal partners.

Adults on volunteer committees often participate as a requirement of or as an extension of their full-time jobs. For them, participation does not equate to lost wages, rather it is a part of their job description. For a young person, involvement in your organization may require unpaid leave from a part-time hourly job, and lost wages. Young people who depend on hourly jobs for income sometimes have to choose between earning money and doing community work. This problem also exists for adults who work hourly-wage jobs. For this reason, you may wish to consider some compensation for volunteers.

"Compensated volunteer" may sound like an oxymoron. This is a highly controversial issue, and may require additional organizational resources. Compensation is not essential for youth involvement, but, it may help you recruit young people that otherwise would not be able to serve.

If you choose to compensate members of your board of directors, some legal and ethical issues may arise. The Board Information Center of BoardSource (see the **Exploring Additional Resources** of this guidebook) has a two-page handout on the issue of board compensation.

For the past 25 years, a high school senior has served as one of the members on the Anne Arundel County Board of Education in Annapolis, Maryland. Since 1975 this board member has voted on all issues. The school district saved \$100,000 annually thanks to the McGill Plan, named after the student board member who proposed modifying the bus schedule during high school mid-term and final exams.

High school students also serve on all advisory, curriculum, and study committees, which make recommendations to the Board of Education. Students also are involved with special task forces such as one that is focused on the grading policy, and another that is exploring alternative approaches for students whose needs are not met by a traditional high school. Modest stipends (\$25.00 per day) are provided to those students serving on curriculum review committees.

Key Component 6

Opportunities to Assume Visible Leadership Roles

Sometimes young board and committee members are not expected or encouraged to do anything more than be a rank-and-file member. Similarly, youth staff members are often left with only minor tasks such as filing and phone duties. It is important to make sure that young people are included in the significant tasks of your organization. Do they have opportunities to be involved with press conferences? Are they asked to chair committees?

The Minnesota Alliance with Youth is a state initiative to help Minnesota communities engage children and youth in reaching their full potential as citizens. The Alliance is co-chaired by two high school students and the Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota. Since the Alliance's formation in 1997, the youth co-chairs have provided briefings at press conferences, met with notable state and national leaders, and played a key role in mobilizing communities to fulfill the mission of the Alliance.

Are young people capable of being officers and other “high-level” leaders?

When informed up-front of the responsibilities and time commitment of high-level leadership roles, young people have been and are able to assume them. In fact, your organization may find it especially advantageous to involve young people in certain areas, such as media relations, since youth in visible leadership roles are sure to gain the attention of reporters.

Should we involve youth in informal meetings and “off the record” discussions?

Absolutely. Many youth volunteers and board members complain that they are forgotten when it comes time to make real decisions in work groups or in informal meetings. If young people are included on a committee or if they are part-time staff members, make sure that they are invited to participate in informal discussions as well.

Key Component 7

Realistic Expectations

Young people and adults should be treated equally whenever legally possible. Consequently, it is important to examine whether your organization has rules and expectations that would effectively prohibit youth from participating as equals.

How can we get around unrealistic expectations?

Young people are very capable of raising money, even large amounts of money. However, young people generally do not have the same type of connections as corporate CEOs. Fundraising quotas are just one example of policies that can effectively prohibit young people from equal involvement. Meeting times during school days, and requirements to attend multi-day retreats can also be barriers. A new paradigm of “equal, yet flexible” is characteristic of how some organizations resolve this issue.

A good way of dealing with this issue is to ask volunteers if they feel that the expectations for their involvement are unrealistic or unreasonable. Let them know that your organization will support them, and will work with them to ensure their continued involvement as an equal partner.

Key Component 8

Access to Transportation

Transportation is a common need of young volunteers. Many young people are either not of legal driving age or do not have access to a car. Consider either the coordination of car-pooling with other members or the provision of taxi/transit fare up-front as good ways of dealing with transportation challenges. Another option is to explore creating an agreement with a local cab company or bus system to transport youth volunteers for free or at a significantly lower rate.

How do we find chauffeurs and chaperones?

This requires a commitment on the part of either staff or other volunteers. If your organization decides to provide mentors to new volunteers, it may be built into the “job description” of a mentor to coordinate the transportation of his or her mentee. If a mentor or staff person drives a young person to and from meetings, that valuable time can also be used to answer any of the young person’s questions about the meeting, and to de-brief. Of course, insurance coverage must be carefully reviewed, and it will be necessary for parents to feel comfortable with transportation arrangements. For more information on this issue and a sample parental permission form, see **Key Component 12—Communication with Parents and Schools**.

Key Component 9

Accessible Meeting Places and Times

A common obstacle to the involvement of young people on boards, councils, and committees is finding a common time to meet. Adult-only groups and organizations are often accustomed to meeting during normal school hours. Getting excused from school can be difficult for students.

Is missing school really a major barrier?

Many schools have policies such as a “ten-day rule,” meaning that if a student misses more than ten days of a class per semester, he/she will fail the course. Even if no official rule is on the books, many teachers frown upon even legitimate absences. If a student must miss school to attend meetings, a letter from a staff member of high standing to the student’s school and/or teachers can be helpful. Generally, it’s best for young people if meetings are held in the evenings or on weekends. Evening or weekend meetings may be less than ideal for some members, but if youth are involved as equal partners, groups need to find a time that allows *all* members to attend meetings.

National 4-H Council expects its Trustees to give or raise “a significant contribution.” The word “significant” is left open to each individual’s interpretation. To a corporate CEO on the Board, that may mean thousands of dollars. To one of the ten youth trustees, it may be less than fifty dollars. The organization also recognizes that the insights and ideas brought by young people are equal to, if not worth more than, financial contributions. This change of policy and mindset is just one example of how expectations for participation can be modified to be more inclusive, yet still reflect the principle of equal partnership.

The Mosaic Youth Center in Robbinsdale, Minnesota has a board of directors consisting of 60 percent youth (between the ages of 14 and 19) and 40 percent adults. Youth and adults share responsibilities in almost every facet of Mosaic’s operation. One significant organizational challenge has been transportation. A contract with a local cab company has made it easier for youth to attend meetings since many live in the seven-city area that Mosaic aims to serve.

Should we change our meeting locations?

Is the location accessible for young people? Is it safe for them to get there if they walk or use public transit? If it is not, you may want to choose to meet somewhere else. If groups must meet during the school day, meeting at or near schools may also decrease the amount of class time missed by students.

If your group ever meets for informal gatherings, it's important to have such meetings in places that are accessible to young people. Involvement in post-meeting social gatherings is important. Often, these spontaneous get-togethers provide a real opportunity for fellow volunteers get to know each other, and become more comfortable and trusting of each other. It is also where many "off the record" discussions take place. Young people deserve to be included in these situations. Therefore, it is best to hold these functions at a time and location that is acceptable to everyone.

Key Component 10

Access to Necessary Resources

Young people often have limited or no access to fax machines, e-mail, voice mail, and other modes of communication that many adult members use in their offices. Setting up an e-mail or voice mail account or ensuring that young people have ready access to fax/copy machines can give youth volunteers and board members the same ability to conduct organizational work that adult members have. It is easy for adults to take certain business tools for granted, and it is not always easy for young people to check e-mail at library terminals on a routine basis. It is essential to ensure that everybody involved has access to the materials needed for equal participation.

What's the best way to reimburse expenses?

The resources needed for your volunteers to fully participate will depend on the function and nature of each group. Volunteers with your organization probably incur a number of out-of-pocket expenses, which are often barriers to youth involvement. Even if you have policies in place for reimbursement of expenses, young people may not have the funds to cover the costs up-front, so you should try to arrange cash advances. Also, it's important to remember that young people may not have their own credit cards to check into hotels for conferences or use the services of copying centers. Providing a means of credit for these circumstances may also be essential for a young person's full and active involvement.

Key Component II

Participatory and Interactive Meetings

If a group is focused on vision and learning, there is room for young people to make substantial contributions. If the group is more traditionally focused on rule-based forms of management and oversight, then it is less likely that youth will have a significant influence.¹³

Volunteers are less likely to have a good experience in a group that is dominated by only a few members who may be more interested in the status quo than learning and risk-taking. Young people are no exception.

Should we continue to use formal protocol like Robert's Rules of Order?

If young people are not familiar with formal protocol, they may be intimidated and anxious about speaking up and fully participating. It is important to remember that new volunteers, who are not familiar with your organizational culture, may be more likely to back out of a group that fails to engage them in meaningful ways. Adults may perceive this attrition as a lack of commitment by young people. However, individuals leave unpleasant situations for many reasons, and if people do not feel comfortable expressing those reasons, valuable lessons may be lost.

For this reason, it is imperative to create an environment where all volunteers feel engaged and invested in the work at hand. Several organizations (see the **Exploring Additional Resources** section of this guidebook) can provide expert assistance to help you create a participatory environment for volunteers and staff of all ages.

What if young people come up with ideas that just won't work?

Young people who are new to your organization may challenge the status quo and offer ideas that may sound incomprehensible to some adults. When you invite young people to the table, resist the temptation to impose your ideas on them. If someone comes up with an idea, try to build on it. Beware, though, of providing only passive feedback. Never dismiss an idea or treat it as ridiculous. Listen and respond thoughtfully. New volunteers can bring fresh ideas that would never be dreamed of by "insiders." Real organizational development emerges when there is honest and thoughtful discussion, active listening, and everyone, regardless of age, is treated as an equal partner.

¹³ Zeldin et al. (2000). *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*, University of Wisconsin-Extension and Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.

Key Component 12

Staff is available to communicate with parents and schools.

When working with young people who are confident, energetic, talented, and articulate, it's sometimes easy to forget that they are still being provided care and guidance by parents or guardians. Talking with their parents up-front can help alleviate later misunderstandings and tension about the roles and expectations of young volunteers.

It is important to ensure that a staff member is available to answer any questions that parents may have. Also, if you make travel plans for young people to attend a conference or other event, parental permission will be required. Maintaining open lines of communication among staff, young people, and their parents is an important ingredient of sustained youth involvement.

How should we handle communications with parents?

All communications with parents should include the young person, and should not involve staff members and parents talking about a young person behind the young person's back. It is important for staff to keep conversations with parents positive, and related to the young person and his/her work with your organization.

You may also wish to consult with an attorney or reputable organization that can provide information on risk and liability associated with involving minors as volunteers. Usually, a parental permission form will suffice. The form on page 19 is provided as an example.

Why should we communicate with schools?

Young people have numerous demands on their time. They often must make difficult choices among volunteer work, sports, faith-based activities, study time, and leisure activities. Many students feel that time spent volunteering would eat up too much of the time spent for other things.

It is unfortunate that volunteering in the community is still seen as extra competition for young people's time. Given all of the things that young people learn through volunteering, it would be easy to make a case for the youth to get school credit for it. This may sometimes be accomplished simply by drafting a proposal to a teacher to substitute assignments or by gaining approval from school administration on formal internship positions.

The tremendous growth in the service-learning movement is making credit for out-of-class work a reality for many students across the country. Be willing to sign papers, talk to teachers, and/or document hours to ensure that youth involved with your organization receive academic credit for the student's participation and learning that occurs while involved in campaign, allocations, or community building initiatives. National Youth Leadership Council (<http://www.nylc.org>) is one of many organizations that can provide helpful service-learning resources. NYLC's contact information can be found in the **Exploring Additional Resources** section at the end of this guidebook.



Sample Parent/Guardian Consent Form & Photo Release

Note: In addition to this paperwork, include a cover letter about the mission of the group, any upcoming activities or meetings, and contact information. You may also want to ask whether the parents/guardians would be willing to help with transportation and/or chaperoning. Provide an extra copy for the parents to keep.

By signing below you are giving consent to the participation of your son or daughter in the program and activities of (*organization*) according to the following terms and conditions.

I am the parent or legal guardian of the child named below, and I fully approve and consent to my child's participation in the (*organization*) and in all related activities. I understand that (*organization*) will supervise my child's participation in these activities, and I fully authorize the (*organization*), and its personnel, representatives, and volunteers to furnish my child with any necessary transportation, food, or lodging relating to these activities. I agree that I cannot hold the (*organization*) responsible for any actions by my child or any damages or harm those actions cause to my child or others, and I agree to hold harmless and indemnify the (*organization*) and any of its sponsors, board members, employees, agents, and volunteers for any liability sustained by any of them as the result of negligent, willful, or intentional acts of my child. I also release the (*organization*) and any of its sponsors, board members, employees, agents, and volunteers from any liability (including but not limited to liability arising from claims for negligence or other wrongful conduct) for personal injury, sickness, death, property damage, and expenses, other than the aforementioned food, lodging, and transportation expenses, which may be directly or indirectly incurred by my child as a result of or in connection with my child's participation in the (*organization*) and related activities.

I grant permission for my child to appear in person or in voice, video, or photographic presentation for radio, television, print, or Internet as it relates to these activities.

In the event the (*organization*) is unable to contact me or to secure my oral consent in the case of a medical emergency involving my child, I hereby give the (*organization*) and its representatives permission to transport my child to a doctor or hospital and secure proper medical care and assistance for my child, including, but not limited to, hospitalization, treatment, medication, or x-rays. I further authorize any treating physician to use his or her discretion in providing emergency treatment. I agree to assume the responsibility for all medical bills for any treatment provided to my child and for any related expenses.

I have read the entire document. I understand it is a release of all claims. I understand that I assume all risks of injury involved in these activities and voluntarily sign my name.

SON/DAUGHTER'S NAME

PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE

DATE

STREET ADDRESS

CITY

ZIP CODE

HOME PHONE

WORK PHONE

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, PLEASE CONTACT:

NAME

RELATION TO CHILD

TELEPHONE NUMBER(S)

[Excerpted from *Youth Infusion: Intergenerational Advocacy Toolkit*, Activism 2000 Project]

Young people may not be aware of their options in this area. It may significantly improve your recruitment and retention efforts if you learn more about if and how students can get credit for working with your organization.

Is it wise to emphasize earning community service credit when recruiting?

Not necessarily. Some students may consider getting involved if their time spent on advocacy activities would help fulfill a service-learning graduation requirement.

In addition to inviting young people onto its board of directors, the United Way of Lee County in North Carolina recently decided to start a summer volunteer program for young people. The program will match youth with meaningful volunteer opportunities that match their interests. A young, full-time staff member of the United Way will coordinate the program.

On the other hand, some youth who are only interested in fulfilling service hours or enhancing their college application may never really become engaged. Hence, publicizing this benefit of earning credit may be positive, but you need to be aware of the down side.

If young people do receive credit for a certain number of hours of service performed, make sure that all related activities are counted. Phone calls, time spent reading related material, and informal conversations related to the organization should be included. Of course, you should check with the school or teacher to see if there are any stipulations concerning the type of activities that can be counted as service hours.



Developing Plans for Youth Involvement

By now, you should have a basic understanding of the principle of youth as equal partners, its key components, and how young people can benefit your organization. This section of the guide is designed to help you with the actual process of engaging young people in *authentic* decision-making and leadership roles. It covers five critical steps to successful and sustainable youth involvement:

- 1) Assessing Readiness to Involve Youth
- 2) Securing Commitments from Adults
- 3) Recruiting Youth
- 4) Providing Orientation and Training
- 5) Sharing Success Stories

This section is designed to provide you with the knowledge and practical tools to assist you in developing your own youth involvement plans. A sample youth involvement plan is provided on the following page. This is an example of a committee that is in the process of including young people.

A blank reproducible worksheet follows the sample plan. The worksheet may be duplicated multiple times for use with each volunteer committee or department in your organization that intends to involve youth as equal partners. Once you have reviewed the process outlined above in steps 1-4, you will be prepared to complete your own youth involvement plans and to begin filling them in with details and timelines.

At this point, you may be asking yourself, “Well, where do we start? What part of our organization is the best place to start involving youth as equal partners?” The next subsection, **Assessing Readiness to Involve Youth**, includes some practical tools to guide you through this process in a logical manner.

The Board of Directors of the United Way of the Capital Area, Inc. (serving Jackson, Mississippi) has had a full-voting youth member for the past seven years. Youth members are generally appointed from the Youth United Way’s Student Volunteer Program, Youth In Action (YIA), and may serve a three-year term. The YIA Program also has an Executive Committee composed of youth and adults who make decisions regarding the program’s operations: community service activities, student campaigns, a youth donor investment process, volunteer recruitment and recognition, and public relations. The United Way collaborates with New Horizon Ministries to hire middle/high school student(s) who serve as part-time staff during summer months. The student(s) is compensated by the collaborating organization. High school and college students also serve as volunteer staff members during the school year. The YIA program has recommended youth to serve on committees/boards of other organizations in the community and continues to be consulted for recommendations of youth participants.

Future plans are to increase the number of youth on the board of directors; include youth as members of the adult allocations committees, general campaign cabinet, and planning committees for the Day of Caring and Pacesetter campaign; and to hire at least one youth as part-time staff with United Way or other community funding sources.

Sample Youth Involvement Plan

Priority	Action Steps Needed	Lead Coordinator	Deadline	Resources Needed
Include three young people on strategic planning committee	Assess readiness of committee members	Executive Director and Jane P. Committee-Member	completed by January 22	postage for mailing of readiness questionnaires to committee members; staff time to review completed questionnaires
	Secure commitment of adult committee members to include youth; provide orientation on importance and benefits of youth involvement	Jane P. Committee-Member	February 8	2 hours of Executive Director's time
	Recruit young people to serve	John Q. Caring	February 11-28	postage for letters to youth agencies and schools; staff time to follow up with interested youth
	Coordinate transportation of new youth members	Sarah L. Carpool	in place by March 15	round-trip taxi fare for each meeting
	Provide new member orientation	Volunteer coordinator	done by April 5	pizza and beverages; staff time

Youth Involvement Plan Worksheet

Priority	Action Steps Needed	Lead Coordinator	Deadline	Resources Needed

Assessing Readiness to Involve Youth

Youth as Equal Partners is based on the premise that young people can be equal partners in *all* aspects of an organization. This idea is sometimes called youth infusion. All too often, organizations that seek to involve youth only think about involving them on structures that make “youth-related” decisions. However,

young people can benefit organizations in all areas. In fact, one can argue that every issue impacts youth in some way, and that the challenges facing young people are connected to the challenges of society at-large.¹⁴

A first step, therefore, in assessing readiness is to look for *all* of the possible opportunities for youth involvement. Perhaps find or create a map of your organization. At this point, don't worry about feasibility, logistics, adult attitudes, etc. You are merely creating a template for readiness assessment.

There are different ways of accomplishing this step. You may find it helpful to work off of an organizational staff chart (a sample is provided). If you choose this option, identify the names of staff people that are in charge of working with decision-making or advisory bodies. These are key individuals that can help you make youth involvement a reality.

Another option is to first make a list of decision-making and advisory bodies (a sample is provided at left). Then, identify the staff people or key volunteers on each of those bodies that can help move youth involvement forward.

Whichever option you choose, it's important to list every possible opportunity for young people to get involved with your organization as equal partners. Remember that young people can also assume meaningful staff positions.

Once you have completed an organizational flow chart, the next step is to determine readiness of adults in those areas to involve youth. Are their attitudes consistent with the principle of youth as equal partners? Are they prepared to assist with the logistical needs of young people? The assessment tools on the following pages are designed to help you make a determination.

¹⁴ National 4-H Council (1998). Statement of Values and Beliefs.

Berkshire United Way, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

ALLOCATIONS PANELS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Panel 1 Child Care/Parenting Skills/Teen Pregnancy

Examples: Early Child Services, Day Care, After School Programs, Infant/Toddler, Latch Key, Single Parent Respite, Preschool Child Care, Wake Up Program.

Panel 2 Families and Youth at Risk

Examples: Strong Families/Strong Kids, Mentoring, Clinical Counseling, Kids At Risk, Sex Assault/Substance Abuse Prevention, Adjustment Counselor, Adolescent Emergency Shelter, Domestic Violence, Visitation.

Panel 3 Health Care

Examples: Medical Transportation, Health & Safety Services, Blood Services, Senior Health Program, Family Support Network, Parent/Child Health, Home Health Aid, Skilled Nursing, Medical Social Work, Crisis Intervention, Elder Outreach.

Panel 4 Recreation Programs

Examples: Comprehensive Youth Development, Social Development, Health & Physical Education, After Hours, Leadership, Coach/Parent Enrichment, Teen Program, Elder Social Development, Radio Reading, Youth Recreation, Day Camp, Assets for Healthy Youth, Youth and Family.

Panel 5 Disabled/Mentally or Physically Challenged

Examples: Recreation/Community Integration, Family Supports, Advocacy/Counseling, Toy Library, Handicapped Therapy, Enhanced Elder Intervention, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Placement, Day Care, Wheel Chair Repair, Winners on Wheels.

Panel 6 Basic Needs

Examples: Disaster Services, Homeless Services, Young Adult Independent Living Program, Senior Adult Kosher Hot Meals, Adult Literacy, Comprehensive Emergency Assistance, and Meal Program.

Panel 7 Community Education

Examples: Family Advocacy, AIDS Program, Youth & Volunteer Services, Training Forums, Cultural Youth Group, Money Management, Community Bereavement Services, New American Citizenship, Caregiver Support Group.

Each of the assessment tools is described below. You may wish to give these questionnaires to every staff member and volunteer in the organization or to target certain committees or departments. You may also wish to add some of your own questions. Feel free to reproduce and duplicate them as you see fit.

When you ask individuals to complete the questionnaires, it is important not to give too much information that may bias the responses. A simple statement to inform the respondent that the organization is “exploring the idea of involving youth in decision-making” will suffice. It’s advisable not to conduct a thorough orientation to the concept of youth as equal partners prior to the assessments. In fact, a review of the responses will highlight items that need to be covered during the adult orientation.

These questionnaires should be completed anonymously. However, it is suggested that you develop a coding mechanism to separate them by department or structure. For example, you might produce questionnaires B and C on yellow paper for the board of directors, on pink paper for the strategic planning committee, on green paper for a particular staff department, etc.

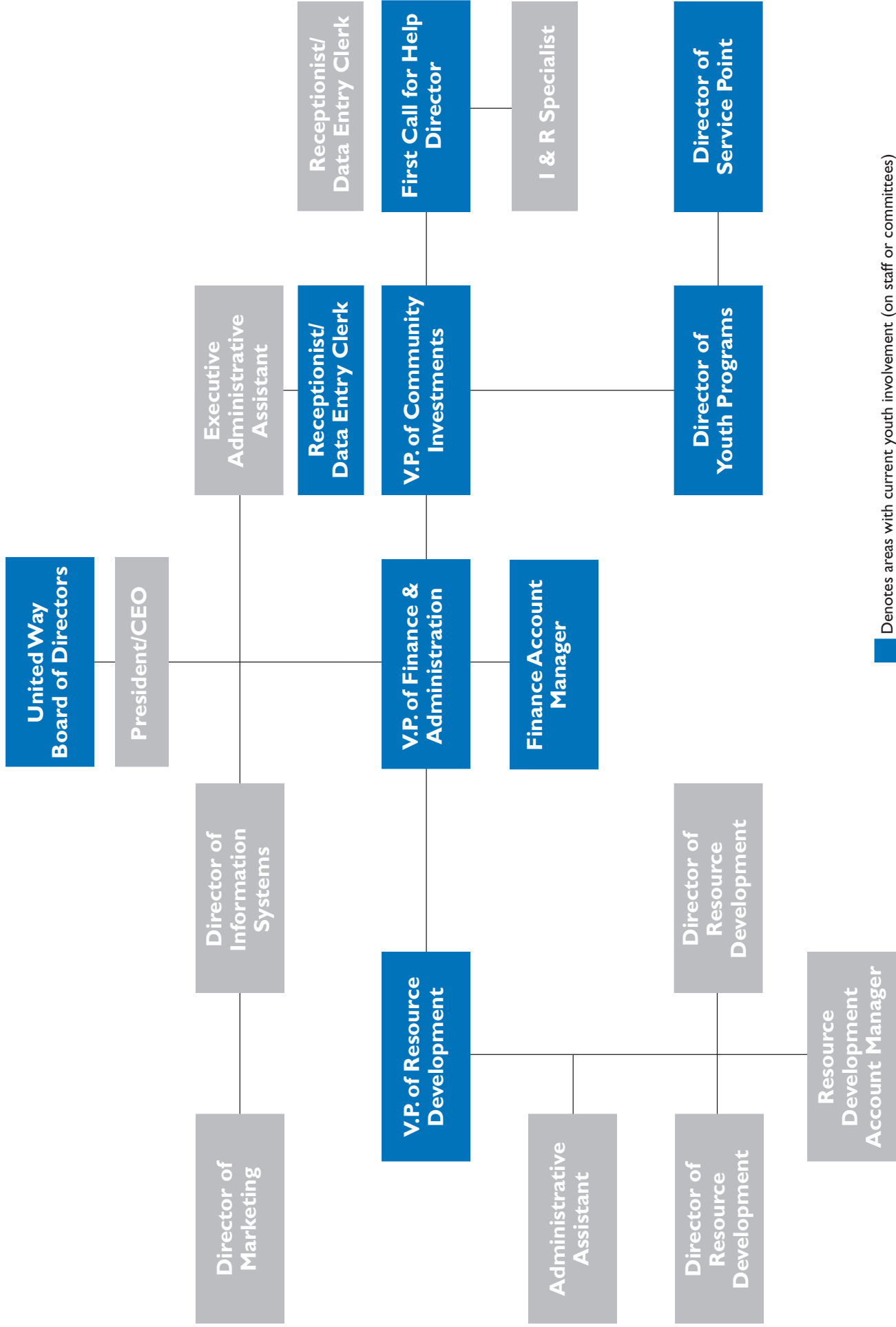
Assessment A—Organizational Capacity should be completed by you, the executive director, or by a committee of individuals who are promoting youth as equal partners. It is intended to stimulate thinking about your organization’s overall capacity for youth involvement.

Assessment B—Organizational Readiness should be completed by individual staff members and volunteers. It helps you assess the areas of the organization that are receptive to the involvement of young people as equal partners, and whether they are ready to ensure that the key components are in place.

Assessment C—Potential Youth Roles is another checklist for individual staff members and volunteers. It is designed to help determine attitudes regarding the capabilities and potential responsibilities of young people. This checklist can help determine areas of concentration. For example, if the majority of checklists come back saying that it is inappropriate to involve youth on the board of directors, you may not want to start by promoting youth involvement on that structure.



United Way of the Capital Area, Inc. Jackson, Mississippi



■ Denotes areas with current youth involvement (on staff or committees)

Assessment A—Organizational Capacity

Among the senior level staff, who would be willing to champion the concept of youth as equal partners? What decision-making or advisory bodies do these staff members oversee or have influence upon?

Can staff development be provided to introduce this concept? What would such staff development include (e.g., potential benefits to the organization key components of youth as equal partners)?

When will the principle of youth as equal partners be shared with the Board of Directors?

Will the key components of youth as equal partners be implemented and observed? What are the barriers to implementing them?

In addition to inviting young people to serve on volunteer committees, will the organization consider employing young people as part-time staff or consultants to work alongside adult staff members?

Do staff members have the time and willingness to serve as mentors to new youth volunteers?

Assessment B—Organizational Readiness

Young people have unique perspectives and knowledge that can enhance our organization's work.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

Our organization should invest more time and energy to involve young people as equal partners on our volunteer committees.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

Young people should be trusted and considered as reliable as adults.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

If young people are involved, our organization should adjust certain meeting times to accommodate student schedules.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

Only young people who have demonstrated strong leadership skills should be involved with adults on volunteer committees.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

I would be willing to assist with the transportation of young people to and from meetings.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

I would be willing to help recruit young people.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

Young people should have input on our board of directors and on committees, but should not be voting members with equal rights and responsibilities as adults.

Strongly Disagree

Undecided

Strongly Agree

Assessment C—Potential Youth Roles¹⁵

Instructions: Make a check in one of the columns beside each “potential youth role”

POTENTIAL YOUTH ROLES	GREEN LIGHT Yes— Youth can do this.	YELLOW LIGHT Maybe	RED LIGHT Not appropriate
Recruit youth Recruit adults Facilitate meetings Help resolve conflicts Devise action plan Participate in long-term strategic planning Develop a budget Analyze a grant proposal Help write a grant Meet potential funders Apply for a paid position Hire and evaluate staff Create a survey Canvass door-to-door Research an issue Speak at community group meetings Set up a phone tree Create flyer/poster Write an article or letter to the editor Design a website Start a listserv Photograph or videotape Lead a workshop Speak at a conference Organize a town forum Draft a press release Call news media outlets Be interviewed by reporters Contact legislators Arrange a meeting Meet with legislators and their staff Testify at a hearing Invite speakers, celebrities, VIPs Serve on the Board of Directors			

¹⁵ Lesko (2001), *Youth Infusion: Intergenerational Advocacy Toolkit*, Activism 2000 Project

Securing Commitments from Adults

After reviewing the questionnaire responses, you are ready to begin the next step of securing commitments from adults to involve youth.

Refer to the completed questionnaires. For each of the volunteer committees, answer *yes*, *maybe*, or *no* to each of the following questions:

- 1) Is there at least one individual (volunteer or staff member) involved with this board or committee that believes in and can help promote the principle of youth as equal partners (based on responses to assessments B and C)?

yes *maybe* *no*

- 2) Realistically, can this board or committee implement the key components of youth as equal partners?

yes *maybe* *no*

- 3) Do the decisions of this structure directly affect young people or issues facing young people?

yes *maybe* *no*

- 4) Are the attitudes of the adults in this volunteer group generally friendly toward youth involvement as equal partners?

yes *maybe* *no*

- 5) Would youth involvement in this group lead to more systemic involvement of youth in the organization?

yes *maybe* *no*

Now, select those structures that received “yes” answers on the first question, and on most of the other five questions. Most likely, these will be the best places to start involving youth as equal partners.

If you find that there is very little or no readiness in your organization, consult with the Mobilization for America’s Children, which can either (1) provide on-site training and technical assistance, or (2) suggest additional resources to help staff and volunteers in your organization understand the importance of involving youth as equal partners.

The next task is to identify the “champions” of youth involvement on each volunteer committee. These are the people referenced in question one above, who are convinced of the value added by young people working for your organization.

The purpose of identifying youth involvement “champions” is to help secure commitments from adults in the entire group to involve youth. Begin working with these individuals. Have them review the key components of youth as equal partners. Share ideas on how to sell the concept of youth involvement to skeptical or cynical adults in their areas of influence. These ideas will become part of your adult orientation, as well as a component of the overall youth involvement plan for that group. You may wish to revisit the section **Introducing Youth as Equal Partners** for tips on “selling” this concept.

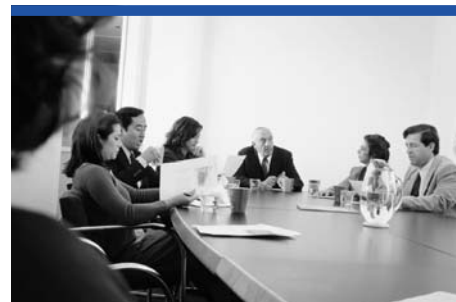
It is important to remember during this adult orientation process that some adults may be uncomfortable with intergenerational collaboration until they actually experience working with young people. As Jenny Sazama, Co-Director of Youth On Board, stated, “So many adults have ‘ah-hah’ moments. ‘Ah-hah,’ a young person can think! I’ve never asked them before.” Unless adults actually get to experience working in partnership with young people, they may not realize the potential benefits.

However, it is essential to have a critical mass of individuals supportive of bringing youth to the table, and willing to help with the process. And although it is helpful if every individual is supportive, it is not necessary. In some cases, incremental progress needs to occur before the concept is fully embraced.

A myriad of resources exists on developing and supporting youth/adult partnerships. Many of these resources include activities that can be used to ease tensions (so called “ice breakers”) between young people and adults, particularly those resistant to the idea of shared decision-making.

One such resource is “Creating Youth/Adult Partnerships,” available through the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>). It offers a multitude of activities that help youth and adults understand each other and work together better.

There are also additional resources available from the organizations listed in the **Exploring Additional Resources** section.



Recruiting Youth

By now you've begun to pave the way for youth as equal partners. Structures within your organization supportive of the concept have been identified. If this is the first time that you have ever worked directly with youth, there is bound to be uncertainty about where to initiate the recruitment of young people. You might even entertain doubts about whether young people would even be interested.

Attracting volunteers, young or old, is rarely easy. But when it is properly conveyed to potential recruits that their voice and opinions genuinely matter, they are much more likely to make the commitment and put forth the energy required to serve as partners with adults.

As with recruiting adult volunteers, it's important to identify the specific characteristics and qualities that you're seeking. If you just go out and look for "any youth" to serve, it is unlikely that you will locate the right candidates.

What if we have no direct contact with any young people?

If you have only limited contact with young people, cultivate relationships with youth workers at community-based organizations who can recommend potential candidates or make open announcements about opportunities to groups of young people in their organizations. You may want to reach out to organizations with which you do not regularly communicate. Also, if your organization has relationships with area schools, ask principals or guidance counselors to suggest potential recruits or to make announcements to selected groups of young people. Talking with school personnel can be fruitful as well, since some schools also have service-learning coordinators whose job is to find opportunities for students.

However, this approach can have serious pitfalls. If you are unclear about the characteristics and qualities you're seeking in a young person, school personnel may only suggest "star" students who have demonstrated strong leadership in the past or only announce the opportunities to elite groups like the student council or the National Honor Society. These young people may see involvement with your organization as merely a resume-building experience, rather than something in which they are genuinely interested. To obtain maximum benefit from youth involvement it is essential to recruit a diverse group of young people, not just those who have demonstrated leadership qualities in the past.

If you do ask adults in the community to recommend potential recruits, use the following points as guidelines:

- Be clear about what you're looking for in a young person. Explain the time commitment required, the qualities you seek, and the perspectives you'd like to hear. Do not say, "We are looking for four good youth to serve on our fundraising panel," or "We want a couple of 'at-risk' youth to be involved." Instead say, "We want to involve a young person who has lived in a homeless shelter," or "We're looking for young people who would be interested in doing an assessment of our financial status."
- Don't expect to get the young person's contact information at first. Most adults who work with youth are cautious about liability issues and data privacy laws, and will not release any information about a young person to you directly. Instead, give as much detailed information as possible about the opportunity to the adult, and request a meeting with the adult, the potential youth volunteer(s), and yourself. At the meeting, discuss the opportunity with the youth and answer any questions that may arise.
- Request youth who were suggested by adults to assist you in the recruitment of additional youth. As you would with an adult third-party, be clear about the commitment, qualities, and perspectives desired. Don't just ask youth to "bring a few friends along," but work with them to identify appropriate peers as potential volunteers.

What are some methods other than "third-party recruiting"?

If you are only looking for a small number of young people (up to ten) to serve on just a couple of committees, recruiting through a third party (i.e., an adult in the community) is probably the best method. Any other "mass marketing" (i.e., flyers) may yield more interested youth than you have room to involve.

However, if your entire organization has received the orientation briefing of youth as equal partners and supports the concept, you may want to try broader scale recruitment methods.

If you decide to take an approach similar to the Youth Asset Commission in Mankato, Minnesota (example at right), it is important that substantive opportunities are available to as many interested young people as possible. Youth have busy schedules, and numerous demands on their time, and it is unlikely that you will get an overwhelming response. But those who do come forward on their own may very well become your most committed and active volunteers, and it is usually most beneficial to tap into that energy while it is fresh.

The Intergovernmental Youth Asset Commission in Mankato, Minnesota has a representative that speaks to each 10th grade social studies class in the Mankato area. Students are informed of all the opportunities to serve as equal partners with adults in city and county government. They also receive forms to express interest, and see a video describing how local government affects their lives. The Youth Asset Commission also posts flyers, maintains a website, and talks with student groups to inform young people (including those not yet in 10th grade) of opportunities.

Should we recruit middle school students? What about high school seniors?

As a rule, recruitment opportunities should not be limited to high school students. If your organization is new to involving youth as equal partners, and there are still adults in the organization that are not fully comfortable with the concept, you may want to start by focusing your recruitment efforts to high school age young people. High school students may be more comfortable and confident in serving with adults. However, this is a generalization, and there are youth as young as age ten who have made significant contributions to organizations and community initiatives in partnership with adults.

High school seniors are sometimes overlooked because it is assumed that they will leave for college. If some of your potential candidates are seniors, ask them what their plans are. If they are not sure, do not hold their uncertainty against them. If their term will be longer than one year, request their assistance in identifying a replacement if they will be leaving.

What should we tell interested young people?

Provide them with the same information that is conveyed to potential adult volunteers. Let them know about the time commitment required, the expectations for participation, information about the organization, etc. Assure them that their voices will be heard, and that everything is being done to create an optimum experience for them. Let them know that their backgrounds, insights, perspectives, talents, character, and energies are the qualities that your organization is seeking.

Let them know that they'll receive an orientation, and that experience is not a prerequisite. Be clear and comprehensive. Don't assume that young people know what is involved, or that they understand how you'll support their involvement. Open a dialogue with them and let them know that they are needed. Let the young person know that he or she can ask anything and no question is stupid.

Also, discuss their transportation needs or any other needs that may conflict with serving. Ask how you can meet these needs.

Once the recruitment process is completed, the next step is to provide them with the orientation and/or skill training that will help them to be confident and effective.



Providing Orientation and Training

As stated in Key Component 4—**Orientation and Training**, on-going orientation is an important ingredient for any volunteer in decision-making roles. When you involve young people, it may be the first time that they have ever participated in a decision-making role of such significance. Orientation and training can increase the confidence of young people who are new to real community leadership roles, particularly those that involve partnership with adults.

What skills and behaviors help young people (or people of any age, for that matter) participate fully and effectively in authentic community leadership roles? There is no simple answer to this question, since each type of participation requires a different set of skills. The following list contains the elements that might be included in orientation and training:

- vision, mission, purpose, history, and structure of your organization
- technical terms (such as 501(c)(3) status, etc.)
- Robert's Rules of Order
- interpersonal and group skills
- making persuasive arguments
- public speaking
- preparing a press release
- by-laws
- meeting facilitation
- understanding the difference between community needs and self-interest

Regardless of training materials used or the format training takes, there are several important points for organizations and institutions to consider when training young people:

1) Formal training may be advantageous, but is not necessarily a prerequisite to youth leadership. Many young people involved in real leadership roles never experience any formal youth leadership training. Instead, their “training” comes from being an active and engaged partner doing authentic and meaningful community work. When young people are regarded as equal partners, and have continuous opportunities to lead, they develop competencies that increase their ability to be effective leaders. In short, formal training can be very helpful, but youth leadership can and does occur without it.

2) **Be careful of a double standard.** Building on the point discussed on the previous page, organizations and communities often require comprehensive formal training of youth, but not of adults. To assume that youth “need” training, but adults do not, creates a double standard that undermines the core principle of youth as equal partners. Many young people have strong leadership competencies from previous experiences, which many adults lack.

3) **Train youth and adults together.** Young people that are new to leadership roles sometimes receive separate training from adults that are new. The development of a youth-adult partnership requires different generations to work together from the start, and the training can be a very important time to build trust and comfort between youth and adult community leaders.

4) **Always consider the needs of trainees as identified by them.** Following a rigid training regimen with no flexibility can serve to frustrate trainees. Training should always be adapted to the needs of its participants, and continuously provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training. For example, trainers and facilitators should always be open to spending more time on a skill development activity if participant consensus indicates that it would be helpful.

5) **Training is not an end.** Training is never an end to learning, but rather a beginning. When youth are equal partners, the real learning comes from active engagement in real community roles. The intent of training is not to mold youth into being “perfect leaders,” but rather to help youth be effective in their roles with adults to positively impact the community. Therefore, it is important not to get overburdened with training. Keep the training specific and make sure that it is relevant and beneficial for youth.

At this point, you should have enough information to fill in the **youth involvement plan worksheet** on page 23. Fill out a separate worksheet with action steps and deadlines for each volunteer committee or group in your organization that plans to involve young people as equal partners.



Sharing Success Stories

Documenting Success

While reading this guide, you've come across many examples of organizations that are involving young people. United Way's Mobilization for America's Children and At the Table are trying to document the stories of organizations across America that are partnering with youth and have the key components in place. You can help us document your organization's story of youth involvement by answering questions such as:

- Where (on which committees, etc.) are young people involved?
- What are the ages of youth that are involved?
- What is the total number of adults that work with youth as equal partners?
- How are youth recruited?
- Are all of the key components in place? What are the challenges in getting them in place?
- How did you introduce and "sell" the concept of youth as equal partners to key staff and/or volunteers?
- Is youth involvement in your organization changing perceptions of young people in general among volunteers and staff?
- Is the involvement of several youth members influencing the deliberations of the key committees?
- Did the provision of the key components make volunteer committees work better for everybody?
- What significant and unique contributions have young people made?

This list is just a small sampling of the questions to assess youth involvement. You may wish to develop a questionnaire for staff or pull together a focus group of youth and adult volunteers to further reflect upon the successes and challenges of involving youth as equal partners.

In general, Youth as Equal Partners asks that you document the extent of youth involvement, and its impact or what happened as a result of it. At the Table has established itself as a national clearinghouse to gather such information. Submissions are always welcome at <http://www.atthetable.org>. Once you reach the site, find the "Youth Voice Database" and click on "feature your organization" to share how youth involvement has been of benefit to your organization.

Exploring Additional Resources

These are resources researched by United Way of America's Mobilization for America's Children. They are generally grounded in the same values and principles promoted in this guidebook.

Activism 2000 Project

P.O. Box E
Kensington, Maryland 20895
(800) 543-7693
<http://www.youthactivism.com>
info@youthactivism.com

Activism 2000 Project is a private, non-partisan organization to encourage young people to speak up and pursue lasting solutions to problems they care deeply about. This national clearinghouse:

- Provides youth with free advice to help transform their ideas into practical proposals and develop strategies for gaining the attention of policymakers and the media.
- Promotes equal youth involvement on advisory councils, citizen task forces, adult coalitions, school boards, etc., and assists public and non-profit agencies by working as partners with young people from diverse backgrounds.

At the Table

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development
7100 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
(301) 961-2837
<http://www.atthetable.org>
info@atthetable.org

At the Table was created to facilitate a coordinated, sustainable national youth in governance movement. Working together with partners across the country, At the Table is helping to educate and inform about the value of youth participation and to prepare youth and adults to work together to create positive change.

At the Table recently published a resource catalog with seven leading organizations to share information about training and technical assistance that is available, and two newly released research reports document the impact that young people have when they are involved in decision-making. At the Table also maintains a national youth in decision-making clearinghouse at:
<http://www.atthetable.org>

BoardSource

1828 L Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20036-5114
(800) 883-6262
<http://www.boardsource.org>
mail@boardsource.org

BoardSource is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening their boards of directors. BoardSource:

- Provides solutions and tools to improve board performance.
- Acts as convener and facilitator in the development of knowledge about boards.
- Promotes change and innovation to strengthen governance.
- Serves as an advocate for the value of board service and the importance of effective governance.

Community Partnerships with Youth, Inc.

550 East Jefferson Street, 3rd Floor
Franklin, Indiana 46131
(317) 736-7947
<http://www.cpyinc.org>
cpyinc@aol.com

CPY, Inc. is a national training and development center dedicated to promoting active citizenship through youth and adult partnerships. CPY, Inc. has over ten years experience in promoting the importance of adding youth voices to organizations, schools, and communities.

CPY, Inc. offers tailored skill-building training for youth serving on boards of directors, in community building initiatives, and in philanthropic endeavors.

CYD Journal

CYD Journal is published quarterly by the Institute for Just Communities and the Institute for Sustainable Development, Heller School of Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University; and is produced in collaboration with the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents and The Forum for Youth Investment.

Subscription information and several articles of each issue are available on-line at: <http://www.cydjournal.org>.

CYD (Community Youth Development) Journal promotes youth and adults working together in partnership to create, just, safe, and healthy communities by building leadership and influencing public policy.

CYD Journal is the leading publication for youth and community workers, educators, administrators, researchers, policymakers, and other practitioners committed to the development of young people and communities.

Development Publications

P.O. Box 36748
Tucson, Arizona 85740
(520) 575-7047
<http://www.developmentpubs.com>
Wlofquist@aol.com

The mission of Development Publications is to create, prepare, and distribute resources that focus on positive and constructive approaches to community and personal change.

Development Publications addresses the major issues facing institutions, communities, organizations, and individuals in today's world, building upon extensive experience in the realms of community and personal development.

Development Publications uses a community development approach that places emphasis on engaging young people (as well as people of all ages) as resources rather than viewing and treating them as objects or recipients.

Institute of Cultural Affairs

1504 25th Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98122
(206) 323-2100
<http://www.ica-usa.org>
icaseattle@igc.org

ICA develops and uses highly participatory techniques to foster creative thinking, consensus-based decision-making and team building.

Its methods generate ownership, create clear goals, open lines of communication, broaden perspectives and motivate people to adapt to their changing environment while honoring the cultural traditions and diversity of all involved.

ICA's materials include meeting facilitation methods, group process evaluation, and other useful group process tools.

National Youth Leadership Council

1667 Snelling Avenue North, Suite D300
Saint Paul, MN 55108
(651) 631-3672
<http://www.nylc.org>
nylcinfo@nylc.org

The Youth Initiatives department of National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) provides training and technical assistance to support youth voice and leadership in all the areas that impact the lives of young people.

NYLC provides specialty training offerings in service-learning, youth in decision-making (youth on boards), youth/adult partnerships, and young people as program managers. Trainings can be tailored for various audiences, and are participatory in nature.

Points of Light Foundation

Youth Outreach
1400 I Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 729-8000
<http://www.pointsoflight.org>
youth@pointsoflight.org

The Youth Outreach department of Points of Light provides technical assistance, training, consulting, publications, programs, and initiatives around:

- Raising awareness and advocating for the engagement of young people in community problem-solving;
- Building the knowledge and skills of young people to be community problem-solvers.

Promise Project

YMCA of Greater Kansas City
3100 Broadway, #930
Kansas City, Missouri 64111
(816) 561-8122 ext. 278
<http://www.ymca-kc.org>

The Promise Project promotes partnerships between youth and adults so that young people’s voices are heard in decision-making.

Through a variety of products and services, including trainings, publications, conferences, and retreats, the project assists and supports successful youth-adult partnerships.

Promise Project developed and published a book entitled “Younger Voices, Stronger Choices” that describes the dynamics of successful youth/adult partnerships.

Youth Leadership Institute

246 First Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 836-9160
<http://www.yli.org>

YLI joins with young people to build communities that respect, honor, and support youth.

Each program builds upon the strengths of young people, engaging them in partnership with adults to create social change and impact power structures.

YLI offers highly interactive technical assistance to youth, youth practitioners, policy makers, and others in order to share information and promote best practices in youth development.

YLI has an annual publication entitled “Youth and Boards: What’s the Status” that outlines success stories and challenges of Bay Area organizations that have sought to involve youth in decision-making.

EXPLORING Additional Resources

Youth on Board

58 Day Street, 3rd Floor

P.O. Box 440322

Somerville, MA 02144

(617) 623-9900 ext. 1242

<http://www.youthonboard.org>

youthonboard@aol.com

Youth on Board envisions a world where young people are fully respected and treated as valued and active members of their families, communities, and society.

Youth on Board offers a wide array of publications and materials for the public. YOB's core publication, *14 Points: Successfully Involving Young People in Decision Making*, has sold more than 2,000 copies and has been used by several organizations looking to include young people in a program, initiative, or change effort.

YOB's most recent, and long-awaited publication, *Your Guide to Youth Board Involvement and the Law* contains practical information, flow-charts, and a summary of state laws related to youth involvement on 501(c)(3) boards of directors.

About the Authors

[Adam Kendall](#) is an independent consultant to United Way of America. A nationally recognized expert on the topic of youth in decision-making, he has worked with Community Partnerships with Youth, Inc., the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National 4-H Council, the Minnesota Alliance with Youth, and numerous other national and local organizations. Adam has served on over 20 governing boards and community initiatives over the past eleven years. He has written and co-authored several pieces on the topics of youth in decision-making and community youth development, and has led numerous workshops and trainings on those issues. Adam's future plans include the completion of a master's degree in youth development leadership from the University of Minnesota.

[Wendy Schaezel Lesko](#) is the founder and executive director of the ACTIVISM 2000 PROJECT. This democracy dropout reversal resource center is located in the nation's capital and encourages young people to participate in the policy-making arena from school boards to statehouses. She is the author of *Youth! The 26% Solution* and *Youth Infusion: Intergenerational Advocacy Toolkit*. She has also written numerous manuals on youth advocacy for national organizations and the federal government. Wendy has given more than 1,000 keynote speeches and workshops across the country. She serves on the national advisory board of Alliance for Justice Co/Motion, Advocates for Youth Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, Earth Force Get Out 'Spoken Campaign, Save The Children/YouthNOISE, and At The Table. Informally, she collaborates with dozens of youth-run organizations across the country. During the 1970's, Wendy worked as a grassroots organizer for Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. For nearly a decade she was a reporter covering the U.S. Congress. In recent years, Wendy's two teenage sons have been steadfast, young community activists.

[Michael Radmer](#) is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since 1995, Michael has worked at the local, state, and national levels as a youth activist. In his most recent leadership role, he and another young person served as co-chairs of the Minnesota Alliance with Youth alongside the Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota. In this position, Michael worked with state and national communities and organizations that seek to improve the lives of young people. He is an outspoken advocate for youth/adult partnerships and authentic leadership roles for youth. Michael's life is dedicated to a core belief that it is essential for citizens to give back to their communities.