

Service-Learning Tip Sheet

Youth Voice

Young people are powerful contributors to society, but too often adults don't seek or hear their voices. Youth voice is not about "letting" youths help, but about working with youths as partners, leaders, and advocates to improve the world.

Following are some tips on working effectively with young people:

Make sure you are ready. Do you or other adults within your organization really want to listen to youths? Why? Are you doing so because it is the "in" thing? Will the youths be fully integrated, or will they be tokens? Are there assumptions or stereotypes of youth involvement that need to be challenged? Are you committed to putting in the time and possibly funding to get the training necessary?

Provide training for the youths and adults. Adults don't always understand youths, and vice versa. When working on projects together, youth and adult styles may vary. Training is vital.

Connect with other groups who have fully integrated youths into decision-making and programming. Find out what worked and what didn't. Select the youths carefully. This does not mean select "the cream of the crop." Often the strongest potential youth leaders are those yet to be identified. So, avoid over-committed youths, or those whose interests don't match the organization's goals. Have young people help in establishing selection criteria, including the number of youths, ages, diversity of ethnic backgrounds, experience, and interests.

Loosen up! Try to be flexible and do things in different ways. If your group normally meets in a classroom or meeting room with tables and chairs, try meeting in a more casual environment, on couches or beanbag chairs. Hold the meeting outdoors if possible.

Be active. Most adults have a difficult time sit-

ting through long meetings or conferences; this also is the case for young people (especially if they have just finished a school day where they were mostly sitting and listening). Think of ways to get people interacting with one another, across all ages.

Respect the youths' opinions. If the young people in a meeting are not participating, do not single them out to ask for their opinions. If they are not speaking, there is a reason. After the meeting, bring them aside and talk to them about their silence. Listen, and make necessary changes.

Provide opportunities for feedback. Check in with the young people frequently. Schedules, interests, and group dynamics can change. Make sure these feedback sessions are honest and open.

Be patient. Even for the skilled youth worker or teacher, it takes time to adjust to youths being at the table. You will hit hurdles, but will overcome them if your organization truly desires to involve youths at all levels. Expect high and low peaks in attendance; these will often coincide with activities like prom, SAT's, and finals. Though such attendance peaks are frustrating, the key is to be flexible, and take creative approaches to scheduling and location.



Youth Voice Resources

Youth Leadership

- Ames, Tami, et. al. What You Need to Know. Community Training and Assistance Center: Boston, 1985.
- Follman, Joe. Giving Youth the Power and the Money: A Guide to Establishing Youth Service-Learning Councils. Clemson: National Dropout Prevention Center, 1997.
- Fortier, Steve, et. al. Youth Leadership in Action: A Guide to Cooperative Games and Group Activities Written by and for Youth Leaders. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1995.
- George, Jillana. Look What Kids Can Do: Youth in Philanthropy. Dallas: Conference of Southwest Foundations, 1997.
- Hoover, Anne G. and Janet Wakefield. Youth as Philanthropists: Developing Habits of Giving and Serving. Fort Wayne: Community Partnerships with Youth, 2000.
- Lesko, Wendy Schaezel and Emanuel Tsourounis II. Youth! The 26% Solution. Kensington: Activism 2000 Project, 1998.
- Lewis, Barbara A. What Do You Stand For? Minneapolis: Free Spirit Press, 1998.
- YouthBuild, U.S.A. Your Guide to Youth Board Involvement. Sommerville, Mass. Call (617) 623-9900 ext. 1242 for copies.)
- ## Youth-Adult Partnerships
- Astroth, Kirk, et. al. Creating Youth/Adult Partnerships. Chevy Chase: National 4-H Council: Chevy Chase, MD.

- Checkoway, Barry. Adults as Allies. Battle Creek: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Kurkoski, Jennifer, Karla Markendorf, and Norma Straw. Youth Voice Begins with You! Seattle: Washington Youth Voice Project/Seattle Youth Involvement Network, 1997.
- Leifer, Loring and Michael McLarney. Younger Voices Stronger Choices. Kansas City: Promise Project, 1997.
- National Fraternal Congress of America. Youth and Adult Partnership Tool Kit. Naperville: NCEA Headquarters, 2000.
- Young, Karen S. and Jenny Sazama. 14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision-Making. Somerville: Youth on Board. Helpful Websites

Helpful Websites

- The Freechild Project
www.freechild.org
- Common Cents
www.commoncents.org
- Youth on Board
www.youthonboard.org
- YSA
www.ysa.org
- American Youth Policy Forum
www.aypf.org
- YouthBuild USA
www.youthbuild.org
- YouthVoice.net
www.indiana.edu/~ythvoice

For more information on service-learning, visit NYLC at www.nylc.org, call (651) 631-3672, or write nylcinfo@nylc.org.

