Youth Engagement Toolkit
Introduction

The PTI Youth Engagement Toolkit is designed for organizations that wish to engage youth and young adults in meaningful leadership opportunities, including serving on a Youth Advisory Community or board.

This guide begins with Principles of Youth Engagement, then dives into specific best practices related to creating a Youth Advisory Community. Advisory Communities may take many different forms. This guide provides Best Practices created and practiced by Project Power and Diverse Ability Incorporated as youth and young-adult-driven organizations, and presents some additional, like-minded resources for your consideration.

Remember that each Youth Advisory Community or board has members with different strengths, values, and goals; it is important to allow autonomy. Let the youth be the voice that determines the projection of their Community and use this toolkit to guide best practices.

“Nothing About Us, Without Us!” —Judi Chamberlin
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Is Your Center Ready?

The Six W’s and How

Staff Readiness

Creating a Budget

Staff Time Commitment
The Six W’s and How

Think through all the W questions (Who? What?, Where?, When?, Why? Which?) for example:

• Who are we looking for? Who will be responsible for which aspects?
• What are we asking them to do? What do we want to accomplish?
• Where can we plug them in? Where are the opportunities for growth?
• When will we know we’re ready? When will we start recruiting?
• Why is this important to us? Why youth/young adults?
• Which goals/objectives does this match? Which location will we focus on?

Now ask yourself:
• How will we reach youth and young adults?
• How will we select, orient, and train youth and young adults?
• How will we make this meaningful?
• How will we measure success?
Staff Readiness

Legal Considerations
Creating a Budget
Staff Commitment
Staff Training
Staff Safety
Adult Allies
Legal Considerations

Legal Considerations may vary based on location. Consult an appropriate professional for legal advice or services.

Here are a few topic areas to keep in mind:

• Insurance considerations – working with minors
• Working with adults under a legal guardianship
• Policies/procedures/practices to ensure safe provision of services
• Mandatory reporting considerations
• Assessing and mitigating risk for your organization

*PEAK and Diverse Ability Incorporated do not provide legal services*
Creating a Budget

This graph represents areas of financial consideration when creating a youth engagement budget. Remember, compensating youth shows that you value their input, and it can encourage retention.

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Staff Commitment

Youth involvement requires dedicated staff time.

• Flexibility and availability for the job.

• Schedule days and times for youth and young adult Community or board meetings.

• Consistency is important for the attendance of youth and young adults and the success of the Community.

• Be aware of, and know who is responsible for timeframes and timelines for items like assignment completion, anticipated progress, monitoring, and evaluation check-in.
Recommended Staff Training

• Mandatory Reporter Training for your state - both Youth and Adults
• Trusted Adult
• Mental Health Training
• CPR/First Aid Certification
• Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
• Department of Labor (Youth Labor Law)

*Some trainings may be mandated for your program or location.*
Staff Safety – Creating Parameters

Meeting Parameters

• Inform directors of individual mentoring and meetings.
• Meet in public places.
• Schedule meetings during the day due to liability; if a youth or young adult can only meet in the evenings, bring a colleague.

Parameters for Gifts

• Exercise discretion in accepting and giving of gifts.
• Gifts should be purchased and approved through organization
Staff Safety – Setting Boundaries

Physical Boundaries

• Respect personal space.

Emotional Boundaries

• Know your emotional limitations and when to ask for assistance from colleagues.
• Know when to refer youth or young adult to appropriate community resources.

Confidentiality and Accountability

• Be aware of guardianship.
• Do not publicly share and post pictures/videos of youth and young adults without release forms from the individuals/parents and permission from center directors.
• Do not use more than two identifiers.
• Do not disclose sensitive personal information.
  (home address, full name, date of birth, disability)
Adult Allies

Allies are trusted people who provide information and direction to others.

Respectful adult allies are people who have life experience and wisdom and share it with no strings attached. They are the people you gravitate to because they make you feel like you belong. They aren’t concerned about all their accomplishments, but rather about sharing what is relevant and timely, to help a young person know that they are a critical component in the process, and that what they contribute will be recognized, considered, and honored.

Having respectful allies – those who really want this youth and young adult engagement opportunity to work and who will serve as ambassadors and role models for others on the team – is necessary for success.
Adult Allies Continued

The organization should assign a responsible person or people to serve as the point of contact, who will act as allies and role models.

It’s more than just having buy-in, and people who like youth and young adults involved; it’s about having the right people in key roles, who can usher in a culture of reciprocal appreciation, acceptance, and admiration.

All people involved in the youth and young adult engagement process need to approach the process with honesty, integrity, and optimism.
Youth and Young Adult Outreach

Direct and Indirect Outreach
Steps for Direct Outreach

1. Use google maps to locate youth/young adult local hangouts
   1. Libraries
   2. Youth Centers
   3. YMCA
   4. Boys & Girls Clubs
   5. Youth Groups
   6. Colleges
   7. Day Programs
   8. Parent Groups

2. After locating hangouts
   1. Schedule tours to see how you can serve and inform youth and young adults about information and resources s can offer.
   2. Following the tour, send a follow-up email or thank-you letter.

3. Prepare Proposals/MOUs if Youth Engagement will be collaborative with another organization
Proposal Letter Example

Title: (Name of Event)
Sponsored By: (Your )

Purpose:
Cost:
Food or Snacks:
Ways your center can collaborate with organization
Where:
When:
Time:
Projected Collaboration Timeline
Indirect Outreach

Email flyers to educational entities:
- High school transition counselors
- Community Colleges
- Trade Schools
- Community Partners

Distribute flyers for Community Resource Bulletin Boards:
- Coffee Shops
- Local Franchise (Starbucks)
- Libraries
- Youth Centers
- YMCA
- Sports Plazas

Place flyers in Newsletters:
- Parent Center
- Youth agencies and community organizations willing to allow advertisement

Social Media Outreach
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Parent Center
- Listserv
- Transition Networks
Youth and Young Adult Recruiting and Application Process

Application Description and Distribution:

The application must have a thorough description of position for which the youth or young adult is applying, including any eligibility and supplemental materials required; time commitment; compensation/benefits offered; and explain the selection process.

A variety of application materials, formats, languages may be helpful. Consider capacity to disseminate materials, field questions, review, and implement selection process – sometimes less is more.

Graphics matter – it tells a story. You want to model and brand your recruitment process like you would any other marketing materials.

Frequent follow-up emails/posts.

Reminders are helpful.
Application Example

Information collected from youth or young adult applicant:
• Contact information - obtain a variety of contact information
• Demographics
• Section on education, experience, or service, or relevant skills
• Informative questions
  • Examples
    • why are you interested/applying?
    • what do you have to offer?
    • what relevant experience can you contribute?
    • what skills do you possess?
• Referral source, if potentially helpful
• Additional materials:
  • 1-3 individuals who can share the youth’s top skills and gifts
Youth and Young Adult Readiness

Trainings
Expectations
Safety
Youth and Young Adult Recommended Trainings

Speech/Communication (Toastmasters)

Self-Advocacy and Leadership Skills

Strengths Training (Clifton Strengths)

Participating in a Conference Call/Zoom Meeting

How to Conduct Research

Learning Hub Trainings
  • A History of the Movement
  • RSA
  • (Include a Chart to show how we all work together)
Trainings Continued

Department of Labor Young Workers
  • Young Worker Toolkit

Work Hours Calendar
  • This will help you track your work hours for group and independent work

Teamwork
  • Advocating at Work with a Team
  • How to Create Group Goals
Roles. These look different depending on the Community or board, participation, and staff responsibilities. Roles can include but are not limited to a president, contact point, secretary, accountability manager, scheduling coordinator or social media coordinator.

Time commitment. Before committing to serving, make sure you’re able to put in the time and effort expected. Showing you’re reliable can help you get a positive reference when applying for jobs, schools, and scholarships.

Assess scheduling conflicts. Find out how often the Community meets, what time it meets, and how long meetings usually last to make sure they don’t generally conflict with your school or work schedule. However, be flexible if you can. If you have too many conflicts, it may appear that you are unable to meet the time commitment.
Sample Expectations

Find out what you will be doing and what is expected of you. Ask about what sort of information you will be expected to know to participate. Will your responsibilities include giving presentations, speaking in public, researching, or creating materials? Will you receive training before you start serving? If the Community meets in person, find out what is considered appropriate attire.

Come prepared! Always ask for a copy of the agenda before the meeting so you can research meeting topics and feel confident and prepared to participate. If you have been tasked with doing something, such as research or surveying youth about policy issues, make sure to bring the requested materials or information to the meeting.

Get ready to learn. There will be a lot of terms and ideas you might not know. Although you may have to ask questions, your colleagues will be impressed by your maturity, strengths, and the unique perspective you bring.
Remember that your input matters. You were selected, which means they want and value your contribution. Remind yourself that your voice counts.

Independent Work. Independent work helps build important skills such as self-direction, self-regulation, time management, and responsibility. Using independent work gives you the opportunity to demonstrate abilities, express who you are, and show your true potential.

Examples: Planning meeting agendas, research, info graphs, etc.

You may have difficulty balancing independent work with daily living activities, so set time aside in meetings or throughout the week to ask questions.
Community Agreement

Creating an agreement between young adult and adult ally Youth Advisory Community members brings people together to help understand each other’s values, while setting expectations and boundaries.

The Community Agreement should include but is not limited to:

• Purpose of the Community or Group
• Group Norms
• Meeting Times/Days
• Email Policy/Etiquette
• Accommodations
• Signature to signify acceptance of Agreement
Community Agreement Example

1. Purpose of Youth Advisory Community
2. Attend meetings every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month on time or let us know ahead of time.
3. Complete independent work in a timely manner.
4. Keep track of time worked and submit invoices in a timely manner.
5. Independent and group work is not optional, per the commitment to dedicating 5 hours each month as outlined in the application process.
6. Notify us of any accommodations you need to participate.
7. Emails need to be checked weekly and responded to within 7 days.
8. All members should participate in meetings, whether by speaking or using the chat.
9. Name and Signature
Youth and Young Adult Safety

Parameters:
Always include a group member when:
  • Volunteering
  • Conducting Meetings
  • During Phone or Zoom Calls

Internet Safety
  • Downloads
  • Emails
  • Guarding your privacy

Consider creating an internet agreement that mirrors the policies and handbook of your organization.
Youth and Young Adult Community

Structure
Creating Mission, Vision, and Values
Goals and Action Plan
Agendas
Meetings
Retention
Measuring Progress
Community Structure

Planning is essential prior to implementing a Youth and Young Adult Advisory Community and throughout its course.

Things to consider:
• What does the community look like?
• When and where will the meetings occur?
• What is expected of youth and young adult members?
• What is expected of the adult allies?

Have a basic outline of what you would like to achieve with your Youth Advisory Community, but be prepared to adapt to emerging needs and shifting priorities as Community opportunities arise.

Choose a structure that your Community decides will work best for the group.
Creating Mission, Vision, and Values of the Community

Choose a method that you are familiar with, or one with which others have had success.

Everyone should have investment and input into the process. While the organization itself may have rights of final approval, this must be known to all participants, and must not influence the process.
Example: Creating a Mission Statement

Parts of a mission statement

What are we offering?
• Offering hope and tactical support to families and individuals who have disabilities
• Information and youth perspective
• Guidance
• Advice
• Paid opportunities for council members

Who do we serve?
• Youth and young adults who have disabilities
• Families
• Teachers
• Parent Centers

Why do we exist?
• To empower youth who have disabilities, individuals, and families
• To give resources
• Youth perspective
Creating Goals

- Create Goals in 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals.
- Readdress at quarterly meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Measurable</th>
<th>Accountable</th>
<th>Reachable</th>
<th>Time specific</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try and make your goal as precise and defined as possible</td>
<td>Establish a criteria to measure your progress</td>
<td>Determine a person who will help you and keep you responsible for your goals</td>
<td>Set reachable goals that you will be able to attain (high expectations are good)</td>
<td>Create a timeline</td>
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<td>How will you know when you are on your way?</td>
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<td>Set small goals toward bigger goals</td>
<td>Having an end time will help you stay accountable to your goals</td>
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Action Planning

Action-planning and goal-setting are processes that require open-mindedness and a safe environment in which to create, explore, and push boundaries. There is always an element of risk-taking in action-planning for an entity, and this should be discussed prior to engaging in the process.

An Action Plan has several components:
- Goals Objectives/Tasks/Steps
- Responsible Party
- Timelines/Deadlines
- Resources/Supports
- Accommodation and Modifications (Encourages retention)
- Measure Progress/Completion
Think of your action plan as a working document that lists the steps you will take to achieve your goals. As a team, revisit, redefine, and revise your action plan at regular intervals, and as needed to respond to emerging needs.

Adapt to emerging needs and shifting priorities as Community opportunities arise.
Agenda Layout

Agendas bring members together and set the tone for all future meetings. It is critical to carefully plan and ensure the members receive the agenda in advance. Having the agenda prior to the date of the meeting gives members an opportunity to consider the issues to be discussed.

A general agenda could include:

- Icebreakers
- Attendance
- Unfinished Business
- New Business
- Upcoming Tasks
- Individual or group work assignments
- Conclusion
Meetings

Conducting Meetings:

The meeting atmosphere is critical. Members use discussion to present views, develop findings, and move forward.

Taking time to create a supportive and productive atmosphere is time well spent. This could be accomplished through scheduled gathering times.

Structure the meeting to avoid wasted time. This conveys a sense of organization, purpose, and productivity.

State the purpose of the meeting and review the agenda. Some communities set goals or objectives for each meeting to focus their work.

Encourage open and informal discussion. The majority rules, but the minority must be heard.

Encourage all members to speak and to respect the rights and opinions of everyone.
Meetings Continued

Periodically summarize discussion and point out connections between points.

Consider and resolve one issue at a time.

Distribute work assignments throughout the group.

Make assignments and work tasks clear and specific; explain expectations, timelines, and products. Discuss the background of tasks so that everyone shares a common understanding.

Keep members informed of activities and progress.

Recognize and reward members. Even a simple thank-you is effective reinforcement.

Evaluate Community work regularly.
Maintaining Minutes of Meetings:

Minutes are the official record of the Community’s activities. Minutes keep individuals and groups informed about the members’ concerns, decisions, and actions. They remind members of their progress and document productivity and contribution.

It is not necessary to record all discussions; however, the minutes should include:

- Any decisions or recommendations made
  - A brief summary of discussion may be included
- Responses to questions or recommendations made at previous meetings
- Assignments to be carried out following the meeting.
  - What is to be done?
  - Who is responsible?
  - When should it be completed?
- Items to be addressed at the next meeting.
Keeping Engagement

Provide avenues for consistent communication outside of meeting times.

Consider an Instagram, Facebook, or Discord through which youth and young adults can connect.

Support the youth and young adults in hosting get togethers in person or virtually. Create opportunities for continued learning and group cohesion.
• Conduct educational workshops on relevant topics.

Support/Sponsor youth and young adults to attend conferences or webinars.

Attend a special or fun event as a group.

Throw a few parties in person or virtually!
Keeping Engagement Continued

Provide opportunities for Skills Practice.
  • Invite members to present at board meetings, staff meetings, or Community events

Include youth and young adults at your “booth” or “table” at Community events and conferences.

Ask your youth and young adult members how you can support and motivate them to remain active and engaged. They’ll tell you! Ask them to include ideas on how they can support one another, as this is also their responsibility.

Think about creating an alumni group after age out.
Measuring Community Progress

Examples:

• Utilize action plan to ensure Community has reached goals and maintained projected timelines.

• Ask questions related to group dynamics and functioning, young adults’ experiences with the group/project, personal and interpersonal growth or struggles, your performance as an adult ally, etc.

• Have youth and young adults complete self-assessments at the start of the group or project to establish baselines.

• Repeat the same self-assessments later (for example every 6 or 12 months depending on your goals as a group) to gauge progress.

• Keep assessments brief to encourage engagement.
Resources for Youth and Young Adults

Labor
- Child Labor Laws and Young Workers
- Young Worker Toolkit
- Work Hours Calendar

Youth and Young Adult Trainings
- How to be on a Conference Call
- Advocating at Work with a Team
- Creating Group Goals
- ACES
- Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset
- 11 Internet Safety Tips for Your Online Security

Self Advocacy
- 4 Steps for Stronger Advocacy
- Self Assessment
- Self Advocacy Plan
Resources for Youth and Young Adults- Continued

How to Research

Essential Google Search Tricks for Research
What is a Scholarly Source
Free Resources for Staff

Canva
SurveyMonkey
JotForm
Mini Course Generator
QRCode Monkey
Youth Engagement Toolkit
Provided by:

Project Power
In Partnership with
Diverse Ability Incorporated