YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health
Governments Working Across the Health and Education Sectors

The Students Commission
Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

La commission des étudiants
Le centre d'excellence pour l'engagement des jeunes

CONTENTS

Introduction

WELCOME

Welcome to the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health's (JCSH) Youth Engagement (YE) Toolkit. This Toolkit is intended to:

1. Help communicate the importance of youth engagement as a key approach to implementing comprehensive school health;

2. Provide research and rationale for practicing youth engagement in schools, school boards and districts, government ministries, health regions, and community organizations;

3. Provide a "how-to" resource of effective practices to support youth engagement in these contexts.

NAVIGATING THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit was intentionally designed as an eBook to enhance the experience of the reader through video, interactive pages, and quick links to tools and resources. In order to maximize your experience, familiarize yourself with the eBook toolbar on the left.

eBook Tutorial
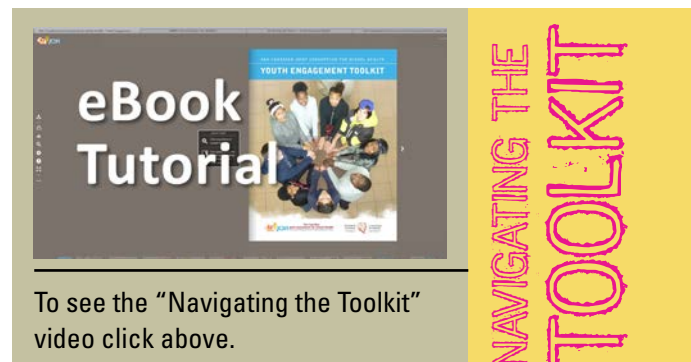
To see the "Navigating the Toolkit" video click above.

NAVIGATING THE TOOLKIT

TOOLKIT BACKGROUND

The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health is a partnership of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments except Québec. Established in 2005, it brings together key representatives from each jurisdiction's health and education ministries/departments, and helps them to work more closely together to support **comprehensive school health** (CSH). The JCSH addresses its efforts to advance comprehensive school health through six topic areas – areas that are important in any school: Positive Mental Health, Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Substance Use, Injury Prevention, and Healthy Relationships. The JCSH recognizes how important it is for the health and education sectors to work together to improve

Advancing school health on six fronts:

Physical Activity

Positive Mental Health

Healthy Eating

Substance Use

Injury Prevention

Healthy Relationships

student achievement across Canada. To guide the work of this collaboration, the JCSH promotes four pillars that must be in place (and supported by a number of stakeholders) to realize CSH: (i) teaching and learning, (ii) social and physical environments, (iii) healthy school policy, and (iv) partnerships and services.

Recognizing youth engagement as a culture and practice that can enhance comprehensive school health, the JCSH approached the Students Commission of Canada to develop a Youth Engagement Toolkit. The **Students Commission** was founded in 1991 with a mission to support young people to put their ideas for improving themselves, their communities and their world into action. In 2000, the Students Commission established the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, which networks academics, youth organizations and young people to provide research, evaluation and training to improve youth programs and youth engagement in Canada.

FOUR PILLARS OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH

Look for these symbols in the margins to see how youth engagement supports the four pillars of comprehensive school health.

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

TEACHING AND LEARNING

HEALTHY SCHOOL POLICY

PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICES

Both research and experience have demonstrated that youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships can change a young person's life for the better.[1] The Students Commission's core values: Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™ and processes inform its work. This toolkit draws on practical examples and illustrations from the programs of The Students Commission, its partners and the latest in research and evaluation from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement.

WHY IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

It's simple. Youth engagement (YE) can and does change lives. This eBook is designed to give you insight into the "how" and "why" of YE, as well as the outcomes you can expect. Youth engagement recognizes young people's right to participate in decisions that impact them and acknowledges the great skills and strengths they bring to the table. It injects young people as valued stakeholders into creating effective and inclusive policies, programs and environments.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

David Forteau
Dancer/Nozo Toronto/
Students Commission/Unity

To see "Benefits of Youth Engagement" video click above..

> *"Youth know what is meaningful and valuable to their community. Even if you are just a few years removed, you will not understand their reality like they do."*
>
> –
> Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

Effective youth engagement leads to positive outcomes for young people at three levels:

1. The Individual level: e.g. increased personal skills, healthy choices, and sense of identity.

2. The social level: e.g. stronger positive connections with friends and adults, and a larger support network.

3. The system level: e.g. greater civic engagement, policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people, and new creative ways to govern.

Please see the **Literature Review** for a detailed overview of the research and outcomes related to youth/student engagement.

> *"I learned that the government of Canada is interested in the opinions of young people and that everyone has different and valuable opinions.*
>
> -
> Youth Participant, HBSC Consultation

Self-Confidence

"*I feel amazing because of this conference. It was life changing.*"

– Youth Participant

"*I am completely sold on the idea that youth engagement in policy development needs to be done early, it needs be done often, and it need to be student lead.*"

– Policy Maker, Ministry of Education, ON

Student-led Research Inquiry

Tricia Labrie, Health Promoting Schools Coordinator, in Central Okanagan BC, co-developed the Got Heath? pilot student engagement program. Got Health? is a student-led inquiry program which engages young people in creating healthy school environments. It was piloted in 8 schools in the interior of BC. In addition to creating opportunities for students to assess their schools through photo voice and lead research projects, the program provides training sessions for adults on how to work effectively with youth. The program is based on the comprehensive school health framework. "Despite the different focuses of the inquiries (e.g. after school physical activities, breakfast programs, smoking cessation, etc.), they were all about connectedness, belonging and contribution," Tricia recalls.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH

Youth engagement is an integral component of comprehensive school health[2] (CSH) and an evidence-based strategy to achieve positive health outcomes and enhance student achievement. When young people are engaged in decision-making, they feel connected to their school environment[3] and community[4], they build relationships with their peers and adults[5], and they learn new skills[6]. They are more likely to make healthy decisions, have healthy behaviors and take fewer unhealthy risks[7]. They are also more likely to **do well in school**[8] and continue learning throughout their lifetime[9].

Comprehensive school health requires the involvement of the whole school and community; everyone is needed and everyone has something valuable to contribute. This is done when the school community addresses priority actions and initiatives through four distinct, but inter-related pillars:

- Teaching and Learning
- Physical and Social Environment
- Healthy School Policies
- Partnerships and Services

The purpose of CSH is to bring about a school climate that supports the best possible health and learning outcomes. Young people can contribute meaningfully to all levels and activities of school health - from teaching and learning, to improving the physical and psychosocial environment, to decision-making and healthy school policy development, to partnerships with parents, the wider community and services.

Click above to see "Youth Engagement & Comprehensive School Health".

KEY FEATURES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

and the 4 Pillars of Comprehensive School Health

Social and Physical Environments

Teaching and Learning

Partnerships and Services

Healthy School Policy

Four Pillars

Social and Physical Environments

Teaching and Learning

Healthy School Policy

Partnerships and Services

Youth Engagement Features

Social and Physical Environments

Physical and Psychological Safety

- Youth/adults work together to set group guidelines/ values
- Physical/visual representations of diversity
- Community building activities to facilitate safety, belonging, connection
- Youth friendly hangouts, youth input on physical space
- Space configurations that accommodates different needs (collaboration, independence, being physical …)
- Safe from threat of violence, harassment or harm
- Opportunities to have fun and explore interests
- Role modeling, supportive youth-adult relationships, integrated youth-adult activities
- Recognition of strengths, contributions, efforts and skills

Supportive Relationships

- Youth-Adult partnerships
- Shared leadership and accountability
- Caring and supportive adults
- Peer and adult role models and mentors
- Collaboration / Teamwork
- Opportunities to develop sustained, long-term relationships

Positive Social Norms

- Adults model positive behaviours
- Youth/adults work together to set group guidelines/ values
- Exploration of diverse life situations, viewpoints, and cultures
- Peer support, leadership and collaboration

Opportunities to Belong

- Celebration of diversity
- Recognition for attempts (including failures), contributions, growth, and achievements
- Value for youth voice
- Community building activities

Teaching and Learning

Appropriate Structure

- Clear and consistent expectations and boundaries
- Adult oversight where necessary
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate activities
- Intentionally designed activities to meet program outcomes

Supportive Relationships

- Youth-Adult partnerships
- Shared leadership and accountability
- Caring and supportive adults
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Positive Social Norms

- Adults model positive behaviours
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- Exploration of diverse life situations, viewpoints, and cultures
- Peer support, leadership and collaboration

Opportunities for Skill Building

- Life-skills
- Challenging age-appropriate activities
- Teamwork, problem solving and interpersonal communication
- Experiential learning
- Internships/ mentorships

Healthy School Policy

Positive Social Norms

- Adults model positive behaviours
- Youth/adults work together to set group guidelines/ values
- Exploration of diverse life situations, viewpoints, and cultures
- Peer support, leadership and collaboration

Support for Efficacy and Mattering

- Youth voice
- Activities focused outside the self
- Opportunities for meaningful contribution
- Youth and adults share leadership and accountability
- Youth-driven program goals and activities
- Recognition of diversity
- Absorbing/interesting activities and issues

Partnerships and Services

Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts

- Parent /caregiver / family involvement
- Community-based programs, resources and supports
- Youth opportunities to make meaningful community contributions (social justice, civic engagement, volunteering…)
- Youth voice and leadership in establishing school / community connections and collaboration
- School / community collaboration, leveraging of resources and joint efforts to address issues

Check out the **Key Features of YE and CSH** resource.

What is Youth Engagement?

DEFINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement defines youth engagement as *the sustained and meaningful involvement of a young person in an activity focussed outside of themselves.*[10] A closer look at this definition provides important hints for effective activities and practices:

1. **Sustained:** Youth engagement that endures over time leads to positive outcomes. However, short and intense engagement experiences can also be effective if they satisfy the rest of the definition. Intense experiences often motivate sustained ones.

2. **Meaningful:** The engagement activities and topics are relevant to young people – this can be assured if youth are asked to contribute to the development of the engagement activity.

3. **A focus outside the self:** Youth are engaged when they feel connected and/or are contributing to something larger than themselves.

Full engagement consists of Head, Heart, Feet and Spirit components:

a. Head: a cognitive component, e.g., learning new things

b. Heart: an affective component, e.g., feeling excited

c. Feet: a behavioural component, e.g., spending time doing an activity

d. Spirit: a spirit component, e.g. connecting with other youth and adults to make change

HEAD

"I learned about different ways to look at people and to be more accepting of others' opinions."

HEART

"I felt accepted for who I was, able to relax, feel good about myself."

SPIRIT

"Felt the energy in my group – used that energy to stay engaged!"

FEET

"I will take some of the games I learned & teach them to my classmates and my family."

Participation is the simple act of showing up; engagement occurs when head, heart, feet and spirit are involved. Engagement is a process that is dynamic, reciprocal and interactive, like a relationship. And just as every relationship is unique, there is no single right way to engage youth. However, there are some key common YE ingredients and promising practices outlined in this toolkit.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

To see "Youth Engagement Defined" video click above.

Youth are full of great insight and can challenge the perceptions you hold and consider issues in great depth."

-
Researcher

Safe spaces

= Engagement

Why not just hold a focus group or a public consultation? What is the difference between a focus group and a youth engagement event? Focus groups are designed for a one-way flow of information from the participants to the researcher or consultation host. They are often critiqued by youth and other marginalized populations as not providing direct benefit to the participants, who never hear or know what happened with the information they contributed.

Youth engagement is relationship-based and rooted in young people's right to

Program Evaluation Tool

Check out this versatile **program evaluation,** based on the CEYE youth engagement definition.

"I feel good and confident about today. I'm glad that we got a lot done too. It also feels good to hear things from other people's opinions. It's hard to realize the harsh reality that's going on in our community"

-

Youth Participant

participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them. It sets up a reciprocal exchange of information and learning between adults and youth in a positive youth development context. Young people should have opportunities to share their ideas, ask questions, and be involved with designing and implementing new programs and policies. Their engagement should be sustained over time so they can take action on their ideas and see the results of their contributions.
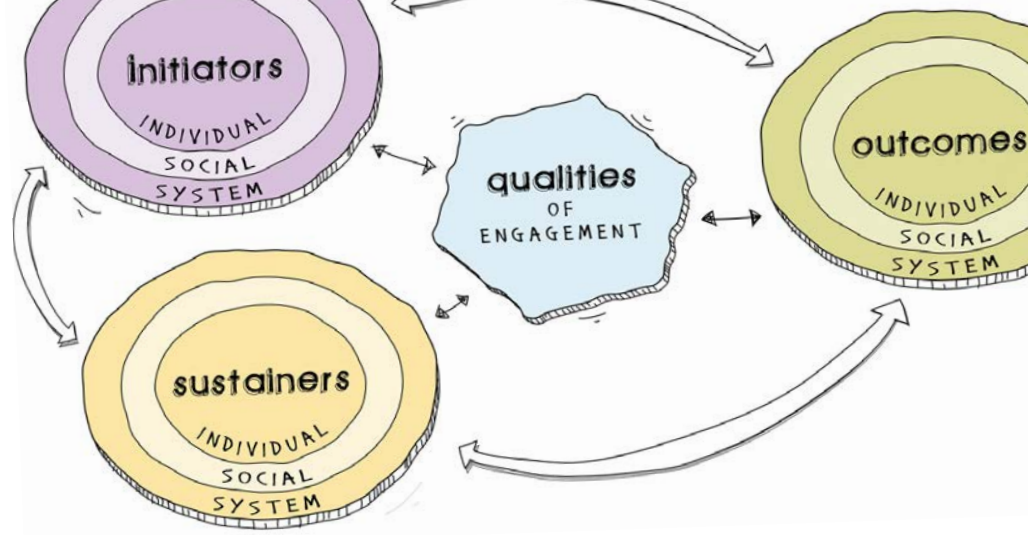
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Youth engagement experiences are complex and vary significantly depending on the context. To date, most of the research related to youth engagement has been focused on the "act" of being involved in activities, such as the type of activity and the frequency of involvement over time. However, youth engagement is more than just showing up to do certain activities: the process of engagement matters. The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement's (CEYE) Conceptual Model[11] provides a useful way to think about engagement, including the various factors that lead to and support meaningful engagement and positive outcomes.

Click above to see the "Youth Engagement Model" video.

THE MAIN PARTS OF THE MODEL

INITIATORS   BARRIERS
SELF
SOCIAL
SYSTEM

SUSTAINERS   BARRIERS
SELF
SOCIAL
SYSTEM

QUALITIES
OF YOUTH
ENGAGEMENT

POSITIVE   NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES   OUTCOMES
SELF
SOCIAL
SYSTEM

Right now
Last month
Last year

© CEYE 2011

"Be realistic: just because you can't do the 'ideal', you can still do bits of it well… start small and you'll see success for youth and your organization"

–

Annie Smith, Executive Director, McCreary Centre Society
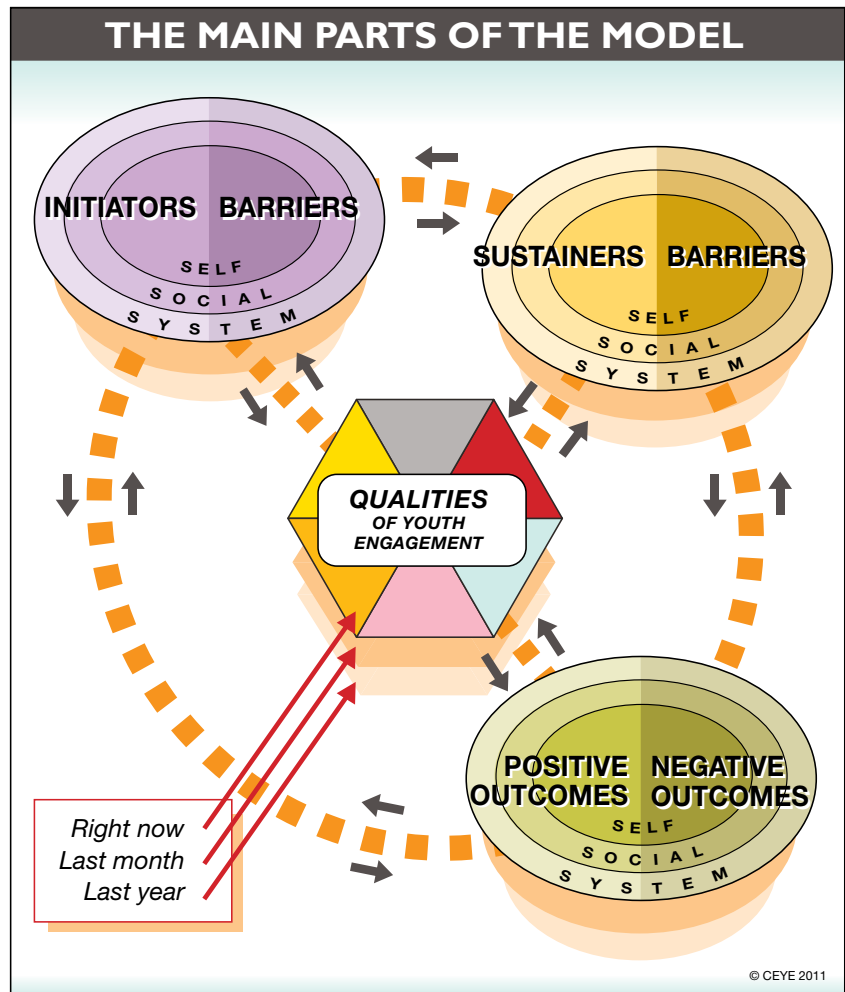
CEYE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
a dynamic process with four key components:

1. Initiators (and barriers): Those things that encourage or hinder a young person from becoming engaged in an activity, organization or process (they need volunteer hours to graduate, their friend brought them, they want to make a difference in their community, etc.)

2. Qualities of a Youth Engagement activity: How an activity, program, or process is carried out – the key features (Young people are involved with setting goals, positive social norms, opportunities to belong, skill building, etc.)

3. Sustainers (and barriers): Those things that keep young people engaged over a period of time, or cause them to disengage (Follow up activities and projects, adults report back to young people on the impact of their ideas, spaces and social networking for maintaining relationships, etc.)

4. Outcomes (positive and negative): The impacts on young people, adults, programs, organizations and the community as a result of the engagement process (a decrease in risk-associated behaviours, more effective youth policies, better relationships between youth and adults, etc.)

The youth engagement process occurs at three levels:

1. Individual or "Self" level: for example, a young person's values, temperament, interest, etc.

2. Social level: for example, the influence of friends, family, teachers, community, etc.

3. System level: for example, opportunities or policies in schools, organizations, government, etc.

When planning a youth engagement initiative, be deliberate about addressing all three levels of engagement.

Take a moment to think about the various features of the youth engagement model and what you are currently doing at your school, department or organization to initiate and sustain youth engagement. What are the qualities of your engagement activities and what are the associated outcomes? Alternatively, if you are currently planning a youth engagement program, consider what needs to be in place. Use the **CEYE Youth Engagement Model Worksheet** to guide your reflection. This is a great activity to do in partnership with youth. See the **Youth Engagement Model** booklet for an explanation.

*"I feel more connected to my country knowing
I can influence governmental figures"*

–

Youth Participant, Tobacco Control Conference

THE RATIONALE FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

There are many important reasons to support youth engagement – from positive outcomes for young people, to better programs and policies. However these three rationales emerge as the most prevalent: [12]

1. The Right to Participate   2. Positive Youth Development   3. Building Civil Society

Check out the **Rationale for Youth Engagement handout**

Those individuals who practice youth engagement on a day-to-day basis are well aware of the benefits, and they likely know these benefits from experience and not from research. Youth engagement makes programs more effective, policies more relevant, and adults and young people more capable and confident – resulting in stronger relationships and community. However, not everyone has experienced youth engagement first hand, so how do we help others understand the benefits? What evidence and experience will convince decision makers that it is worth the time, effort, and resources to involve young people in governance, program and policy development, and implementation? A number of experts who have had to make the case for YE shared their best "elevator speech":

The Elevator Speech

Click above to see the "Elevator speech" video.

ELEVATOR SPEECH
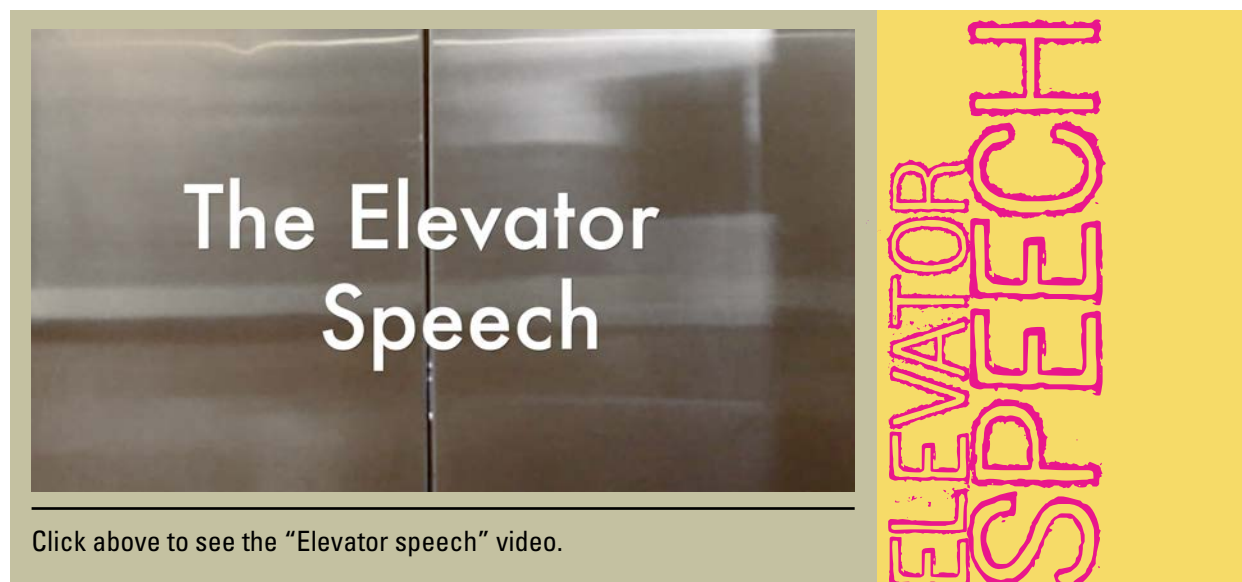
The positive outcomes related to youth engagement are many – both for individuals and for society. See the **Youth Engagement Outcomes handout**. (For full references related to these impacts, please see the **Literature Review**)

"Young people have the right to be consulted and have a voice."

–
Matt DeCourcey, Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, NB

"New ideas and faces have opened me to share my own thoughts and feelings. I felt like everyone was accepted and 'fit in', which is rare in my circle of friends at home. I am leaving the conference refreshed and with a new attitude."

–
Youth Participant

"Youth engagement doesn't always have to be expensive, or about money - it can be as simple as making a policy change or using existing resources in a new way"

–
Jill Lightwood, Dept. of Environment, Labour and Justice, PEI

"I feel happy that I was able to contribute"

–
Youth Participant, Tobacco Control Conference

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION: A HOW-TO GUIDE

OVERVIEW OF HOW-TO GUIDE
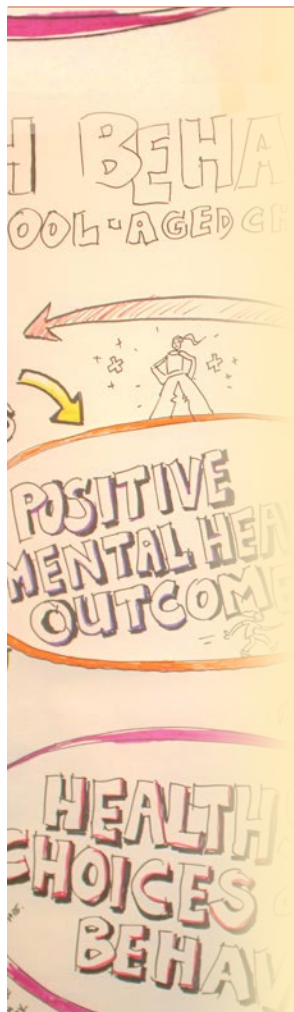
A) "The Motivation:" Initiating Youth Engagement

Key Steps to Initiating Youth Engagement

B) "I Felt Heard:" Qualities of Youth Engagement

The Eight Key Qualities of Youth Engagement

C) "Keep It Going:" Sustaining Youth Engagement

Key Steps to Sustaining Youth Engagement

D) "When the Going Gets Tough:" Addressing Challenges

Shared Challenges to Youth Engagement

E) "So What?" Evaluating the Impact

Evaluation of Youth Engagement Projects

By this point, you likely have a good understanding of what youth engagement is all about and why it's so important. This "how-to" section describes the hands-on process, offering tools and evidence-based practices to effectively engage young people. The How-to Guide is organized by the CEYE Conceptual Model of Youth Engagement and provides tips and techniques to initiate, sustain and deliver meaningful youth engagement programs and activities.

Remember, integrating youth engagement at the system or organizational level requires conditions of readiness and change.

"I try to help the decision makers understand that in order for young people to be engaged, they need to be brought into the process. Sometimes it's just a teaching opportunity. I ask them: What's our real outcome, and how are we going to get there? Usually involving young people is key."

–

Joyce Sunada, Ever Active Schools, School Coordinator, AB

FOUR STAGES OF CHANGE
to Promote Youth Engagement

1. UNFREEZING

4. INSTITUTIONALZING

2. CATALYZING

3. INTERNALIZING
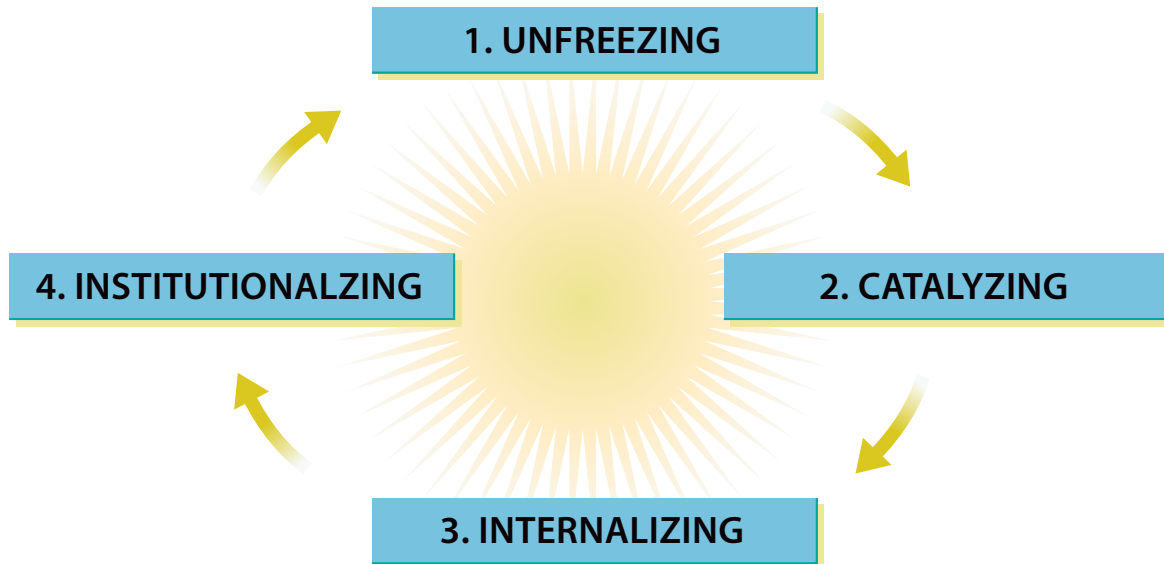
Kirby's Institutionalizing Participation Framework[13] describes four stages of change in order to promote youth engagement:

1. Unfreezing involves recognizing the need to change and unblocking existing attitudes and styles of working. Both existing beliefs and practices, and external pressures (e.g. government, funders, etc.) need to be unfrozen.

2. Catalyzing knowledge into action can be facilitated by establishing "champions" within organizations and systems. Catalyzing needs to be supported by senior management and involve youth early in the process, as the vision for youth engagement is set against current culture and politics in the organization/system.

3. Internalizing change involves building staff capacity with time and resources for recruitment, training, practice, and evaluation, so that engagement becomes sustainable within organizations and systems.

4. Institutionalizing youth engagement into policy and standards is necessary for it to become mainstream practice.

The indicator frameworks that are included in each section of the How-to Guide use these four stages of change as benchmarks.

A) "THE MOTIVATION:"
INITIATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

"It was fun, I met a lot of great people and feel like I can make a difference."

–

Youth Participant

Steps for Policy & Decision Makers:

1. Initiate the Culture Shift
2. Assess Organizational Readiness
3. Find the Internal Catalyst

Steps for Practitioners:

1. Engage Young People Early
2. Establish Shared Objectives
3. Establish Partnerships
4. Maintain Frequent Contact
5. Identify Background Research Questions
6. Use Expertise Collaboratively
7. Consider Diversity
8. Recruit Young People
9. Provide Pre-engagement Activities
10. Prepare Youth-friendly Materials
11. Develop a Logistics Plan

So you know that youth engagement is important and you want to enhance youth voice and opportunity in your school, ministry or organization – now what? This section outlines key steps to initiating youth engagement.

To see "Initiating Youth Engagement" video click above.

INITIATING STEPS FOR POLICY & DECISION MAKERS

1. Initiate the Culture Shift

At the system level, the first step towards meaningful youth engagement is often about shifting cultures. This means unfreezing the existing culture and identifying the strengths and areas where youth engagement might already be happening or has the potential to be initiated. Champions catalyze cultural shifts by helping others understand the value and need for youth engagement. Champions highlight examples of success and actively look for and create opportunities to engage young people in projects, policy development and/or governance.

"We need to dispel the myth that youth engagement takes more time – the benefits that you get on the other end are far greater. Putting in a little more effort on YE up front saves time and creates greater benefits in the future."

– Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

2. Assess Organizational Readiness

At the system level, three key conditions need to be in place for children and youth to participate in decision-making:

1. Cultural attitudes that encourage youth participation;

2. Political, legal and administrative structures which ensure rights to participation; and

3. Economic and social conditions that enable people to exercise their rights.

As a school, organization or government body interested in enhancing youth voice, understanding where you are at will help identify key areas for change and action. The **Spectrum of Youth Engagement** is one helpful way to identify where your organization is starting from and where you want to be.

"We've had success this past year with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. Our pitch was simple: We really don't know what's going on inside the heads of youth when it comes to road safety. All we have is some quantitative data telling us youth are particularly vulnerable to injury on the roads. They understood the dilemma immediately and supported us to start some sensing work with youth. They were very happy with the initial work and are now supporting our next step to bring youth to the table."

— Morris Green, Department of Health & Wellness, NS

EVALUATE YOUR READINESS

Interested in assessing your organizational readiness to engage youth? Check out this evaluation resource: **Organizational Readiness Module** or online at **Sharing the Stories**.

3. Find the Internal Catalyst

Organizations and government bodies (systems) get involved with youth engagement for specific reasons, just like young people do. For example, researchers might be motivated to engage youth in creating their teen health survey, in order to ensure the language is relevant to their target audience. This is how the culture of youth engagement often starts – with a specific project. In most instances, the project acts as a catalyst, leading to a greater understanding and appreciation of youth voice and participation. Once governments and organizations have experienced the benefits of youth engagement first hand, they generally embrace other ways to involve young people in decision-making, policy development and programming.

As a champion of youth engagement, look for the internal catalyst and use the opportunity to not only engage young people, but also to engage adults in your sector. Give adults the chance to interact with young people and experience youth engagement first hand. This experience will go a long way to shifting perspectives.

"We need more youth engagement champions who understand what it means to meaningfully involve youth in our work."

–

Morris Green, Department of Health & Wellness, NS

INITIATING STEPS FOR PRACTITIONERS

1. Engage Young People Early

Young people should be involved early in the process of planning an activity or initiative – this includes generating project objectives. Young people will bring valuable ideas and perspectives to the table and can help ensure the initiative will resonate with other youth.

Young people often get excluded from these early stages due to adult assumptions about their interests or skills. Counter to these assumptions, many young people enjoy strategic planning and have lots to contribute. In addition to their own learning, youth also teach adult members a great deal about practicing and modeling effective youth engagement throughout the entire project.

2. Establish Shared Objectives

When you have multiple partners and stakeholders it is important to establish shared objectives, values and principles for an initiative. Take the time to learn
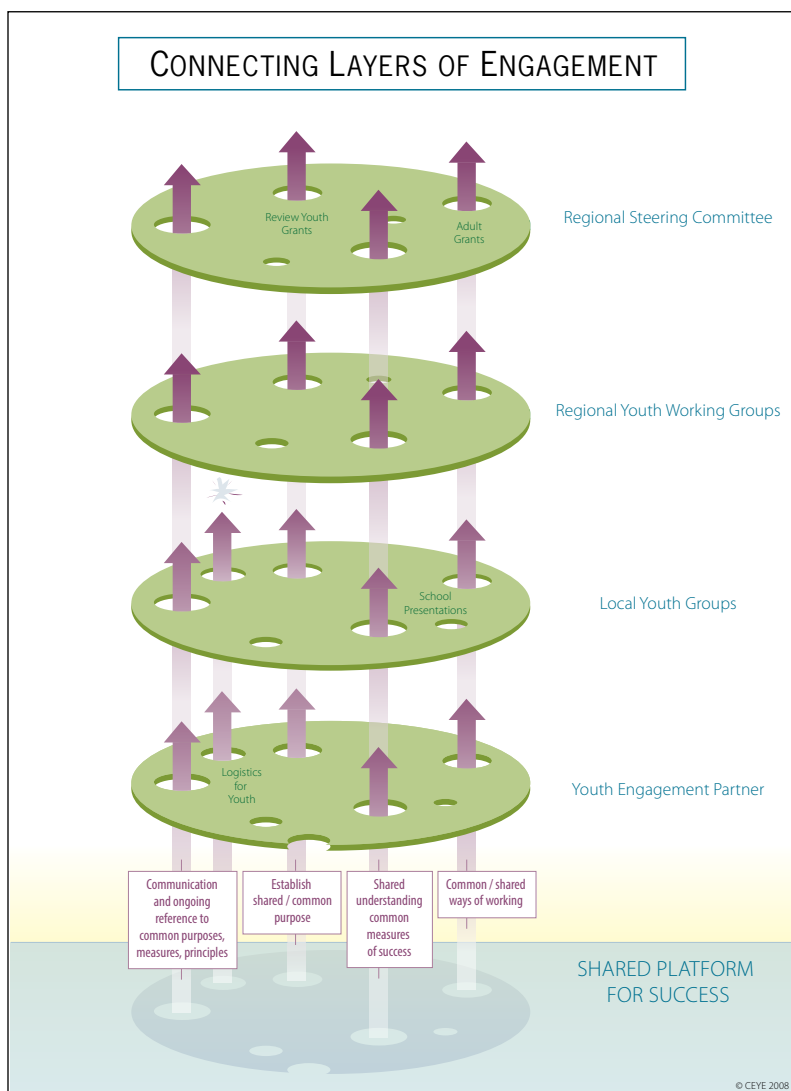
"When young people are heard and engaged in policy development, they influence whether that policy will be accepted or resisted by the youth community… They can also identify the counter arguments that we need to be prepared for. Their insight on policy or program development and implementation is extremely valuable."

–
Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

what brought people to the table, what they are hoping to achieve, and how they want to achieve it. Initiators occur at individual, social and system levels. Be deliberate about considering all three levels – establish objectives and principles that will meet each stakeholder's interests (youth, policy makers, community organizations, academics/experts).

This should include "checking assumptions" to ensure mutual understanding. For instance, if a committee believes the project should be "youth-led" have a discussion about what that looks like. What are the roles of adults in a youth-led initiative? Setting common

CONNECTING LAYERS OF ENGAGEMENT

Review Youth Grants
Adult Grants
Regional Steering Committee

Regional Youth Working Groups

School Presentations
Local Youth Groups

Logistics for Youth
Youth Engagement Partner

Communication and ongoing reference to common purposes, measures, principles

Establish shared / common purpose

Shared understanding common measures of success

Common / shared ways of working

SHARED PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

© CEYE 2008

Click above to see the "Shared Values and Objectives" video.

objectives, principles, and values will provide an ongoing frame of reference that helps decision-making and execution throughout the project process.

3. Establish Partnerships

Partnering with an existing advisory group or youth serving organization is an efficient and effective way to facilitate young people's engagement. Partnerships bring diversity and strength to a project and can be a great way to learn new practices. Organizations that work directly with young people on a daily basis will be in a position to recruit young people, support their involvement, and help develop activities that will resonate with their youth. These organizations will also be able to support youth-adult partnerships early in the planning process.

"Justice, Health and Education sectors need to work together on supporting young people."

—

Jill Lightwood, Dept. of Environment, Labour and Justice, PEI

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Kathy Berggren-Clive, with the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia, as part of her work, promotes and supports the engagement of young people in policy, service and program development. The new BC Child and Youth in Care Week, which celebrates young people in and from government care, was a direct recommendation from youth consultations. Youth were also involved in the development of the new Care Plan for children and youth in care, the Youth Engagement Toolkit and the MCFD Complaints Youth Brochure. Youth Engagement is central to the work of the ministry. Engaging youth contributes to the effectiveness of programs, services and policies. It helps keep organizations enthusiastic, energized and informed. It also supports young people to develop to their full potential and nurtures the next generation of advocates for youth. "At the ministry, it's about continuous quality improvement. We need to understand the perspective of the client – to help inform and improve our services."

4. Maintain Frequent Contact

Meeting on a regular and frequent basis helps an organizing committee define the tasks that will achieve their objectives, collaborate on task execution, and review decisions as required. It also helps foster relationships, which are key to effective youth engagement. If partners have not worked together before, there is, ideally, a face-to-face meeting early on in the planning stage. After that, regular contact and decision-making can readily occur through conference calls and online communication. When engaging young people in a planning committee, be mindful of supporting transportation needs, meeting during times that are convenient for young people and using language and working styles that are accessible to youth.

5. Identify Background Research Questions

Building off of the project objectives, the planning committee should outline the key questions for which youth input is sought. So for instance, if a planning committee is interested in developing school policies that encourage physical activity, they might outline a number

Click above to see the "Students As Researchers" video.

of questions they want answered by students: What motivates you to be active? How can teachers and staff encourage physical activity? What school-wide physical activities or events would interest you? Identifying these research questions early will help in the development of youth engagement materials and activities.

6. Make Use of Expertise

Everyone brings different, yet valuable skills and expertise to the table. Most planning committees should include individuals with policy/program expertise, those with research and content background, those with youth engagement experience, and those with

INITIATING ACTION

Joyce Sunada, Ever Active Schools, School Coordinator, AB, organizes Healthy Active School Symposiums (HASS): one-day conferences where school teams (a mix of students and teachers, parents) come together to learn and plan for the coming year. They also collect promising practices and stories from schools and share them with others. "For example, an elementary school came to a HASS and learned about making smoothies. They got really excited and started a smoothie 'tiki hut' and now it has expanded to be a regular weekly option for the students. It also inspired other student-led initiatives. So the symposium was just an initiator that has led to a number of other projects. It could lead to policy change."

first-hand experiences of the "issue" in question. (Often, this is young people!). Ensure that the expertise each person brings to the process informs the work of others. For example, researchers can help ensure that a youth engagement process will also provide accurate research deliverables. Likewise, young people can ensure that the research findings are relevant and that materials researchers prepare are presented in the most effective language and style for participants.

7. Consider Diversity

Youth, researchers and policy makers all benefit when diversity is prioritized. The criteria for youth participation should be determined by the initiative: if it relates to living with a disability, it makes sense to recruit youth with disabilities. In many situations, policy makers and program developers are interested in ensuring that ethnic, racial, linguistic, geographical interests, and lived experiences are all represented.

Striving for socio-economic diversity and diversity in terms of academic performance are also important. There is sometimes

a belief that youth who are not doing well in school will not be interested in policy or program development. However, social justice is often a real motivator for these youth. They have much to teach advantaged youth if given a safe space to do it. Work to create a safe space where all young people have room to participate in multiple ways. Young people who might appear disengaged can bring great insight into an issue, often because of their lived experience. Research demonstrates that the more diverse the participant experience, the more positive the outcomes youth report during an event or program.[14]

8. Recruit Young People

There are many initiating factors that might lead a young person to get involved with a project, program or initiative. They may be attracted by a monetary honorarium, the chance to travel, or a desire to make change in their community. Acknowledging these motivations is a useful way to recruit and plan for engagement experiences that meet a variety of needs and interests.

"Wisdom doesn't just come from age – it comes from being a current member of a community"

–
Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

Create materials to explain the initiative and what is expected of participants. Applications and recruitment materials can encourage youth to start thinking about key concepts related to a project. However, take care that your application process and materials don't scare off disengaged youth. Leave room for "showing up" with a mentor or friend. Questions about applicants' thoughts, interests and connection to a topic can also provide additional criteria to ensure

> *"Using social media (Twitter, Facebook, Internet) to engage youth is imperative. In saying that, face-to-face engagement does work best, but you still need to get them in the room...and keep them engaged through mechanisms that they tune into regularly."*
>
> –
> Mellissa Wood, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, NT

> *"We only make place for one student, or two students at the table…then we expect them to be able to speak on behalf of all youth."*
>
> –
> Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

diversity. Strive for a collective balance of diverse experiences rather than an individual-focused competition.

Direct face-to-face, telephone, email and Facebook contact with youth, their organizations and adult allies, helps build interest and comfort. "Shoulder tapping" and word-of-mouth recruitment are very important tools to support young people to become involved, especially those less-likely to participate.

9. Provide Pre-Engagement Activities

For Youth: Preparatory activities can help get young people excited and informed for an upcoming project. This could be an online survey as part of the application process, a video conference call with selected participants, or tasking young people to survey their friends and family about an issue. Activities like these help young

DEFINITION

Constituency: gathering ideas and perspectives from peers, or people you represent

people understand the concept of "constituency" and representative voice, encouraging them to think about the similarities and differences between their own experience and the experiences of others. Unfortunately, many youth are put in a position where they are asked to speak on behalf of all young people, without adult support to learn about constituency building. If young people will be engaging in a position where they are expected to represent "youth voice" (for example, sitting on an advisory committee, or board of directors…) it's important to teach them about consulting others.

For Adults: Adults are often unsure of their role at a youth engagement event or initiative and preparation and guidance for them is important. In some cases, having adults fill out pre-engagement quizzes, surveys, and permission forms, similar to youth, can be a useful way to get adults to reflect on their experiences and how they may relate/differ from those of young people. Youth-led "adult ally trainings" which

Tips for Adult Allies:

Be "listeners" – Record significant points and comments made by youth and post them so that young people see their voice is heard.

Ask questions – Be inquisitive, rather than making statements, to avoid the assumption of authority conferred to adults. If something a youth says is inaccurate or inappropriate, use questions to prompt critical thinking. Give room for youth to make the point that you as an adult might want to make.

Be "you" – In day-to-day interactions, authenticity and honesty are the qualities youth most respect in adults, not "coolness," humour, or celebrity status. Share appropriately who you are and what you do.

Check your assumptions – Challenge negative assumptions you and/or other adults may have about young people. Not all youth are the same, be open to new and positive relationships.

Seek input – Young people want to be part of the decision-making process. Before planning an activity, event or project, ask young people what they want.

Explain decisions and restrictions – If a youth suggested activity or idea is not possible (because of budget, timelines, appropriateness…) explain this to young people rather than just saying "maybe" or "no."

ADULT ALLIES

To see "Adult Allies in Action" video click above.

focus on how to build supportive and positive partnerships between young people and adults can also help prepare adults for their role during an event or project. Ideally, adults are neither too directive nor too withdrawn. Non-participation by adults who are trying to give space to youth voice can be perceived as disinterested, uncaring, and unsupportive. Adults should participate with youth, but be mindful of prioritizing youth voice and experience.

See the **Adult Allies Training Manual** and **Adult Allies in Action booklet**

10. Prepare Youth-Friendly Materials

Youth (and adults!) recommend bright colours, highlighted and bold text, and paragraphs presented in bullet form as effective ways to communicate information. The use of video clips, photos and visuals is also recommended. Ultimately, it is important to create connections and relevance between the topics being discussed and young people's lives.

Youth recommend that content prepared by policy makers and researchers for youth should contain visual representations that are simple and clear. For example, graphs should have simple headings that translate research concepts like "domain" into the real world equivalents, like "home" or "school." Youth involved in the planning committee can be a great asset for developing materials that will be accessible and interesting to youth participants.

11. Develop a logistics plan

Attention to logistical details can go a long way to supporting a successful initiative. Have a plan in place for collecting guardian consent, medical information, dietary restrictions, and photo/video release forms. Here are some **sample forms** to help. Likewise, be prepared to support transportation and accommodation needs, arrange meeting spaces, and support outings and activities.

It can be helpful to assign a logistics "lead" from the planning committee to ensure information is collected, programming arrangements are made, and ensure that logistics do not take over the planning related to process and content.

AN INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

Youth Engagement is both a science and an art. There are promising practices that correlate to positive outcomes, yet there is no one "right" way to engage young people. The Indicator Framework developed for this toolkit offers a broad overview of the practices that correspond to effective qualities of youth engagement. For each section of the How-to Guide, the Framework outlines how

Indicator: provides evidence that a certain condition exists; it helps assess your progress towards an intended outcome or goal.

EVALUATION TOOLS

For further evaluation tools, please visit the Students Commission's, **Sharing the Stories** platform. This online evaluation platform includes academically validated tools to evaluate youth engagement. Check out these tools related to initiating youth engagement:
Organizational Readiness, **Leadership Module**, **Youth Adult Survey**

these indicators might look at various benchmarks. The Assessment Tool offers practitioners a detailed list of indicators that will support them to assess their organizational practices and plan for the future. The indicators included in this toolkit are not meant to be a prescriptive and exhaustive list. Rather they offer a summary of promising practices. Some of these indicators may not be relevant to your context. Do not be afraid to start small or prioritize the areas where you would like to begin.

ASSESS YOUR PRACTICE
INITIATING

Indicator Framework   Assessment Tool

B) "I FELT HEARD:"
QUALITIES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

While youth engagement contexts and activities vary considerably, there are a number of evidence-based practices and qualities that lead to positive youth developmental outcomes. This section of the How-to Guide will explain these qualities and share practices that support effective youth engagement.

"It was fun," "I felt listened to," and "I learned new things" are some of the recurring themes from evaluations of successful youth engagement activities. Combining fun, with the meaningful opportunity to learn, contribute and be challenged is the art of meaningful YE (head, heart, feet, and spirit). In general, research points to the importance of creating a youth-friendly atmosphere for any youth engaging activity – whether it be a sports group, a youth conference, or involving young people in organizational governance. In other words, the process or qualities of these environments matter just as much, if not more, as the activity itself.

According to Eccles and Gootman[15], there are eight key qualities associated with positive developmental settings that promote youth engagement. Whatever the engagement activity or initiative, try to ensure all these qualities are being met.

8 QUALITIES OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL SETTINGS: BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

8 Qualities at a Glance

1. Physical and Psychological Safety

2. Appropriate Structure

3. Supportive Relationships

4. Opportunities for Belonging and Meaningful Inclusion

5. Positive Social Norms

6. Support for Efficacy and Mattering

7. Opportunities for Skill Building and Learning

8. Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts

To see "8 Qualities" video click above.

Click above to see "Simple Steps to Youth Engagement" video.

1. Physical and psychological safety

Physical and psychological safety enhances young people's ability to learn and participate freely. To maximize young people's experience in an activity, we must ensure participants feel safe at all times. This includes holding programming in locations that are free from violence and unsafe health conditions, and reducing the probability of unforeseen threats. This also includes using practices that encourage and increase healthy and safe interactions and decrease unsafe or confrontational interactions among youth.

See **checklist** for practical tips.

"I learned a lot more than what I said … especially when we talked about bullying because that brought memories of when people used to bully new kids that came to school. What I have learned today is I'm gonna take it back and share it with my community and with the people of Mama Wii."

– Youth Participant

> *"I've learned perspectives (especially different ones) are very important"*
>
> –
> Youth Participant

> *"I talked and engaged with new people in discussions! Watched videos, and listened to others!"*
>
> –
> Youth Participant

Tobacco Free Schools

Speaking from her experience at the Canadian Cancer Society, Lynn Ann Duffley recalls the benefits engaging young people in implementing the province wide Tobacco Free Schools policy. Lynn Ann oversaw the Tobacco-Free School Initiative, and worked with TATU (Teens Against Tobacco Use) Groups to implement the policy. *"These groups took on this issue in a variety of ways – developing peer leaders; providing peer support; presenting to near-by schools, municipal leaders and community groups; sharing information; working to change school policies and services; creating inclusive environments for smoking and non-smoking students…"*

The TATU groups had a significant role in the policy development and implementation. In particular, they really helped changed the messaging for smokers. Tobacco Free Schools was not against smokers, rather it was about creating a healthier learning environment for everyone. This messaging was crucial to successful implementation and could not have been done without partnering with students.

2. Appropriate Structure

Appropriate structure is not about creating a rigid program or eliminating unstructured activities. Young people benefit from a variety of experiences, including those that are organic and self-driven. Instead, when we talk about having appropriate structure, we mean creating an environment that has clear boundaries, expectations, and adult support/supervision as required. This is about making participants feel safe by creating a consistent environment that they will feel comfortable returning to. Some of the components that contribute

Click above to see the "Adolescent Brain Development" video.

to appropriate structure include well-trained staff, age-appropriate activities, and clear guidelines. See **checklist** for practical tips.

3. Supportive Relationships

Supportive relationships are a key indicator of positive physical and mental health.[16] When young people have at least one caring adult in their lives, they demonstrate fewer risk-associated behaviours, greater academic achievement and higher self-esteem. Supportive relationships give young people the opportunity to experience respect, warmth, connectedness, and effective communication[17]. This quality is about having well trained staff and adult allies that will honour young people's successes and failures, and be willing to extend their support above and beyond the scope of the program. See **checklist** for practical tips.

Youth-adult partnership is based on mutual respect for what each collaborator brings to the table. This supersedes more traditional concepts of

"I was able to work with others in a positive environment and developed concrete ideas"

–

Youth Participant

mentorship, youth-led, leadership development, or coaching which still position adults as the "experts." In a youth-adult partnership, adults and young people alike are there to learn and share knowledge and power.

> "*I may not speak much, but I have listened and learned a lot, I felt good about connecting with our group.*"
>
> – Youth Participant

4. Opportunities for belonging and meaningful inclusion

All young people should feel that they belong regardless of their sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, abilities, socio-economic background or peer crowds. This quality is about providing young people with opportunities for social inclusion, social engagement, and integration. This involves teaching and encouraging cultural competence, and creating opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation. See **checklist** for practical tips.

> *"I feel comfortable because people shared ideas about how to overcome the obstacles and it makes me feel good because I have problems with my mother and my family, personal issues."*
>
> –
>
> Youth Participant

Click above to see the "Community Builders" video.

5. Positive Social Norms

Positive social norms and a respectful atmosphere contribute to psychological safety and encourage young people to engage in positive behaviours. This means promoting and upholding an environment that is inviting, non-judgmental and inclusive. Maintaining high expectations of youth (and adults) particularly in terms of their behaviour, interacting with others, and respecting group-created guidelines and values is important. The expectation is that each individual will exhibit their strengths and best efforts most of the time, if a positive atmosphere has been established. See **checklist** for practical tips.

"I connected by doing ice breakers and introducing myself."

–
Youth Participant

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CHILD RIGHTS

To see "Youth Engagement in Child Rights Impact Assessment" video click above.

ADVANCING GBLTQ RIGHTS

One of the best examples of youth engagement we have, and showcase regularly, is our work with The Youth Project – a support organization for LGBT youth in Nova Scotia. The Youth Project is truly youth centered with a youth board making all decisions on activities and projects, with the support of adults on staff. The Youth Project has been a regular connect for a number of Nova Scotia government departments when developing programs, policies and strategies that impact youth, including LGBT youth. This past year we asked youth from The Youth Project to get involved in the revision of policy manuals with the Department of Community Services to better reflect the reality of LGBT children and youth in care. Recent youth engagement work has led to a ministerial ruling that every school in Nova Scotia must now allow a Gay Straight Alliance in the school if students ask to have one established. – Morris Green, Department of Health & Wellness, NS

6. Support for efficacy and mattering

Young people should feel that they matter, that their ideas matter, and that they can make a difference in their community. Youth-friendly environments empower young people to be autonomous, use their voice and contribute to making a change in their communities. This involves employing practices that are challenging and require youth to take on responsibilities, as well as those that focus on growth and improvement. It is also about continually acknowledging young people's input and ideas, and creating an environment where they feel listened to and valued as contributors. See **checklist** for practical tips.

7. Opportunities for skill building and learning

Not surprisingly, young people benefit from opportunities to learn and practice new skills. This quality is about developing increased competencies, confidence, and self-esteem. It is also about fuelling curiosity, and giving youth the opportunity to discover new interests. Youth-friendly environments should offer hands-on experience and provide opportunities to develop skills such as teamwork, communication and problem solving. See **checklist** for practical tips.

Incorporating a knowledge inquiry process is an effective way to enrich a youth engagement event or program.

ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

For Alberta Education, the Speak Out Team has the important role of engaging Alberta students in the decisions that are made about their education system. Through Speak Out Forums and an annual Speak Out Conference, Alberta's youth are asked to share their experiences and ideas with those people who make decisions about their schools. Students have the option to "speak out" online, attend a Speak Out event or join the Minister's Student Advisory Council. Student voice is helping shape programming, inform policies and is influencing many government departments outside of Education.

"Lots of youth feel like they are being ignored and want to be heard. Many youth feel the same feelings."

– Youth Participant

Click above to see the "Minister's Youth Advisory Council" video.

MINISTER'S YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Young Decision Makers Project Model

Young Decision Makers (YDM) – Project: ....

LEGEND: ☑ Completed ☒ Underway ☐ Not started

3. Discussing Issues
☐ Materials for young people to inform and explore with others.
☐ Space for exploring and communicating ideas.

4. Decision Making
☐ Deciding how we decide.
☐ YDM positions on topics.
☐ Defining our voice to others.

2. Studying Issues
☐ Identify the issues related to the topic.
☐ Gathering research: our own experience, others' experience and science.

5. Inform Policy Makers
☐ Recommendations to government, business and youth organizations
☐ Report responses back to members

WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION

1. Action
☐ INITIATOR: Action or idea identified by a young person or organization to explore.
☐ SUSTAINER: Acting upon some of the recommendations and evaluating

SUSTAINERS: new action steps

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

The Students Commission
Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

La commission des étudiants
Le centre d'excellence pour l'engagement des jeunes

SUPPORTS

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Khaleel Rajwani
Youth Advisor,
Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study

Click above to see the "Youth Engagement in Research" video.

Knowledge inquiry methods, such as the **Young Decision Makers Model**, Participatory Action Research, or Collaborative Inquiry, give young people the opportunity to research, discuss, learn and create messages about an issue. Youth are often excluded from the means of knowledge production in similar ways that they are excluded from decision-making. Research is often done on youth rather than with youth. The shift means engaging youth as researchers, recognizing them as contributors and experts of their own experience, with critical knowledge to contribute.[18] See the **Students as Researchers Toolkit**.

8. Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts

Young people live and interact in a variety of social settings including school, extra-curricular activities, peer groups, family, neighbourhoods, and community organizations. Positive youth development is supported when these spheres can work collectively to create meaningful experiences and decrease risk behaviour. This quality is about developing synergy and connection between a young person's social environments, thereby increasing their sense of community belonging. Young people benefit when their efforts

and values in one area have connections to another. It is also about broadening a young person's social interactions and breadth of the experience outside the scope of a specific program or initiative. See **checklist** for practical tips.

> For additional programming considerations check out the **Don't Forget** resource.

"I will use some of the games and techniques in our groups at school and around Halifax, notably dealing with tobacco, but other groups as well"

– Youth Participant, Tobacco Control Conference

AN INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

Review the indicators for Qualities of Youth Engagement, then as a team, think about your current practices. How do you currently create youth-friendly environments? Do your practices support all 8 qualities of youth engagement? What could you do differently? Use the Assessment Tool to record your discussions and set goals for improving engagement practices.

Remember, some of these indicators may not be relevant to your context, or may be better understood as a goal your organization is working towards. Don't be afraid to start small or prioritize the areas you'd like to work on. You don't need to have everything in place to start practicing youth engagement – the simple task of asking for a young person's input is a great place to begin.

ASSESS YOUR PRACTICE
QUALITIES

[Indicator Framework]   [Assessment Tool]

C) "Keep it going:" Sustaining Youth Engagement

Steps for Policy & Decision Makers	Steps for Practitioners
1. Report Back to Young People	1. Create Follow-Up Activities
2. Seek Out Future Engagement Opportunities	2. Maintain the Relationships
3. Share Success Stories	3. Link Youth to Organizations and Opportunities

Depending on their experience, young people may be motivated to stay engaged with a project or initiative or disengage from the opportunity. Sustaining factors involve practices and spaces to maintain relationships, connections, motivation and action. When planning for a youth engagement initiative, think beyond the initial event, meeting or project, to establish mechanisms that will sustain involvement.

Click above to see the "Sustaining Youth Engagement" video.

SUSTAINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

"I am inspired to share the findings of this study to my peers."

–
Youth Participant

SUSTAINING STEPS FOR POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS

1. Report Back to Young People

If you have asked youth to give input on a policy or program, it is important to report back to them on how their ideas were used. Seeing and hearing about the impact of their contribution motivates young people to stay engaged and get involved in future opportunities (e.g. civic engagement). Young people are also in a key position to share information with their peers. If they have been involved in developing a policy or program, youth will likely have a greater interest in and ability to support implementation.

2. Seek out Future Youth Engagement Opportunities

If you have involved young people in decision-making, policy development or program design, you will be in a unique position

to identify other projects that would benefit from youth voice. Look for new and existing opportunities to sustain the engagement of young people or innovative projects to engage new youth.

3. Share Success Stories

Help facilitate a culture shift by sharing the benefits and experiences of youth engagement with those who are less familiar or sceptical. Share recommendations, reports, pictures and videos or do presentations on the outcomes of a project. Be an advocate for youth voice within your ministry, school board or district or organization.

SUSTAINING STEPS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Create Follow-Up Activities

If an initiative has concluded, or funding has run out, consider involving interested young people in developing proposals for future funding, or in follow-up activities that require less support. These could be small research inquiry projects, taking action on recommendations from the project, or assisting with elements

INQUIRY BASED LEARNING

Darren Haley, Coordinator of Student Services with the South Shore Regional School Board, NS describes the benefits of engaging young people in designing their own learning environment. "At the middle-school level – we're experimenting with inquiry-based learning. Youth are facilitating their own learning, which has changed how we view best practices. We've seen increased attendance, lower office referrals, and better report cards"

of project reporting. Most youth engagement activities foster great motivation and commitment for community change so it's important to keep the momentum going rather than letting it fizzle out. Some additional follow-up activities include:

- Establishing local youth groups to discuss/take action on a certain issue

- Creating "youth messages" (videos, posters, blogs, skits, etc.) to share information from the project

- Delivering presentation to adults and youth about the project outcomes, recommendations, and/or next steps

- Fundraising for next steps and/or future events

- Holding weekly/monthly conference calls

- Developing planning committees or advisory committees to provide ongoing input

- Conducting follow-up evaluations 3– 6 months later which ask young people to reflect on the experience and how it impacted them

- Connecting youth to other opportunities and organizations that further their goals and match their interests

"We engage youth in a number of ways and for a variety of reasons. As a Government Agency, our legacy has been the ability to coordinate groups of youth through a consultative workshop type process and then line them up with an opportunity to speak with decision makers (Ministers, committees, etc). When decision makers hear directly from youth, support is there, policies are created, and change happens." – Mellissa Wood, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, NT

Maintain the Relationships

The friendships and supportive relationships that young people develop through youth engagement activities are often what they value and learn from the most. Create mechanisms and spaces to help maintain these relationships. Establish a Facebook page; find a meeting space for young people to connect in person; host follow-up events, social gatherings or calls; and check-in with young people even after the project has wrapped up. Thank you letters or cards, certificates and volunteer-hour accreditation are other ways to maintain connections and recognize contributions.

Link Youth to Organizations and Opportunities

If there are not any resources or activities to support ongoing engagement, seek out other opportunities for young people. Link them to different community organizations – do a resource tour, visit organizations in person and introduce them to staff and youth members. If a young person showed interest in a specific issue or

For further evaluation tools, please visit the Students Commission's, **Sharing the Stories platform.** This online evaluation platform includes academically validated tools to evaluate youth engagement. Check out these tools related to sustaining youth engagement:
Organizational Readiness,
Youth Adult Survey

"I will take what I have learned (especially about the influence of support networks) back to work to see how we can use these networks to share information with youth"

–
Adult Participant

activity, connect them with community organizations or projects working in this area. A young person's support network should expand, not shrink, following a youth engagement activity.

AN INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

First, review the indicators for Sustaining Youth Engagement. Then as an individual or organizational team, think about your current practices. How do you currently sustain young people's engagement? Do you report back to young people? What could you do differently? Use the Assessment Tool to record your discussions and set goals for improving engagement practices.

ASSESS YOUR PRACTICE
SUSTAINING

Indicator Framework   Assessment Tool

Remember, some of these indicators may not be relevant to your context, or may be better understood as a goal your organization is working towards. Don't be afraid to start small or prioritize the areas you'd like to work on.

D) "When the Going Gets Tough:" Addressing Challenges

"You have to build a culture of youth engagement, so that it is not seen as a program or an add-on... it must be embedded in the day-to-day practice and work of the ministry"

–

Kathy Berggren-Clive, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development

Practicing youth engagement is not without its share of challenges. Many people experience resistance to involving young people because of the perceived costs, time commitment or difficulty with incorporating young people into adult structures. This resistance usually comes from a lack of understanding. Many people are uncomfortable with the notion of youth engagement because it is foreign to them or they are unaware of the multiple benefits: for youth, for organizations, and for policies. Lack of awareness is best challenged with information and hands-on experience so share success stories, research, and outcomes associated with youth engagement and give skeptics the chance to experience youth engagement first hand. Help decision-makers and practitioners understand the positive impacts associated with youth engagement and let them know that young people have the right to have their voices heard. Changing perceptions and

SOME CHALLENGES

"Challenges to youth engagement have definitely been

1. comfort level and willingness of adults to let go of control… and

2. comfort level, willingness, skills of adults to be facilitators versus educators.

Connecting those who are succeeding with youth engagement with those who are questioning or interested has been a strong approach."

– Tanya Dunn-Pierce, Manager, Population and Public Health, Saskatoon Health Region

To see "Addressing Challenges" video click above.

"We need to remember that sometimes it's OK to let young people make mistakes."

–

Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

cultural practices is slow but important work. Help shift the attitudes of those around you.

One common challenge is the adult tendency to ask one young person, or a very small number, to represent the youth perspective as a whole. This can happen when one young person is invited to sit on a board of directors, or with the creation of a youth advisory committee. Young people in these positions are rarely taught about the notion of constituency building (gathering ideas and perspectives from their peers). Instead adults often expect that one young person can speak on behalf of, and give insight into, all young people.

What can you do? Challenge these practices, and give young people in these positions the time and resources to consult their friends and classmates. Teach young people how to gather input through surveys, Facebook polls, focus groups or casual conversations. These practices will develop young people's research skills, civic engagement and help them understand social policy and political structures better. Adults who are relying on youth input will benefit from the broader perspective, as will programs and policies.

E) "So what?" Evaluating the Impact

Evaluation of youth engagement programs, initiatives and events is a method of continuous reflection and critical thinking by youth and adults. Evaluations can serve many functions:

1. Informing decision making throughout the cycle of designing, implementing, ending and generating new engagement activities

2. Ensuring engagement is and continues to be meaningful for all involved

3. Providing ongoing feedback and opportunities to hear voices that may be marginalized

4. Sustaining engagement and commitment when evaluation results are used to improve the initiative

5. Indicating whether objectives are being met

6. Modeling, reaffirming and clarifying the values and principles of the initiative

7. Revealing and communicating strengths, areas for improvement, and successes

8. Initiating a new cycle of engagement and activity

9. Sharing the story of the initiative with others, including stakeholders, funders, etc.

10. Strengthening and increasing the breadth of knowledge about youth engagement, the outcomes, and effective practices.

EVALUATION

Judit Alcalde
Research Consultant

To see "Evaluation" video click above.

EVALUATION MADE EASY

For a quick and easy program evaluation, try using **Head Heart Feet Spirit sheet**

A mix of formal and informal evaluation activities can be useful. Informal evaluation activities can be integrated into the program, such as a feedback wall that everyone can write on, or a regular check-in/check-out opportunity to share how things are going.

The Students Commission uses the Youth Engagement Conceptual Model as an evaluation tool – focusing attention on initiators, sustainers, qualities and outcomes at the individual, social and system levels.

"If you listen to young people – they have their community's best interest in mind"

–

Matt DeCourcey, Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, NB

Sharing the Stories

There is a significant gap in consistent evaluation across youth engagement initiatives, due in part to a lack of resources and easy-to-use tools. The Students Commission has developed Sharing the Stories, an online platform that brings together youth engagement evaluation tools. Based on a review of the literature and experience with various programs, the Students Commission has gathered tools that have been academically validated and tested in various youth engagement contexts with diverse young people.

Sharing the Stories is intended to not only provide evaluation tools for individual initiatives, but also share the broader story of youth engagement that emerges across diverse initiatives, organizations, and geographic locations. For example, using consistent measurement tools could result in an evaluation project that looked at all initiatives in a school district, or all initiatives that use a comprehensive school health framework across the country. See **Sharing the Stories** platform.

Throughout this Toolkit relevant evaluation tools have been suggested. Here is a summary of those recommended tools:

1. **Organizational Readiness:** Assesses organizational initiating/sustaining factors

2. **Leadership Qualities:** Assesses program leader/facilitator skills and behaviors that are connected to youth outcomes

3. **Youth-Adult Survey:** Assesses the quality of youth-adult relationships

4. **Positive Settings:** Assesses the 8 key features of positive development settings

5. **Conference Survey:** Examines youth-adult relationships in youth events, with a focus on contribution and decision-making

6. **Youth Outcomes:** Measures young people's perceived impacts from their engagement at the individual, social and system levels

7. **Organizational Outcomes:** Measures perceived impacts of youth engagement on organizations and communities

8. **Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit:** Open-ended opportunity for participants to reflect on and share different aspects of their engagement experience.

Resources

1. Youth Engagement Literature Review
2. CEYE Youth Engagement Model Worksheet
3. CEYE Youth Engagement Model Booklet
4. The Rationale for Youth Engagement
5. The Outcomes of Youth Engagement
6. The Spectrum of Youth Engagement
7. "Don't Forget:" Additional Programming Considerations
8. Indicator Framework: Initiating Youth Engagement
9. Indicator Framework: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement
10. Indicator Framework: Sustaining Youth Engagement
11. Assessment Tool: Initiating Youth Engagement
12. Assessment Tool: 8 Qualities of Youth Engagement
13. Assessment Tool: Sustaining Youth Engagement
14. Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit Evaluation
15. Organizational Readiness Module
16. Positive Settings Module
17. Conference Survey
18. Leadership Qualities Module
19. Youth-Adult Survey
20. Youth Outcomes Module
21. Organizational Outcomes Module
22. Adult Allies in Action Booklet
23. Adult Allies Training Manual
24. Sample Forms for a Youth Engagement Event

Endnotes

1. See **literature review**

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