



Setting the Stage for Effective Youth-Adult Meetings

Purpose: To support adults and organizations as they create space for high-school aged youth to engage in meetings, workshops and opportunities.

Initial Thoughts: Before you invite youth into a space explore the questions below with your team of adults.

Questions to consider before inviting and engaging youth at meetings/events:

- What will be the role of Youth?
- What do you hope to get from the engagement of Youth?
- Why are you interested in the thoughts, ideas and input of Youth?
- What are some ways you might envision the way you operate or the direction of the work changing once youth are involved?
- Can your organization/group move meetings to afternoon/evenings for when youth are out of school or think about lunch opportunities and meet at the schools.

Reflections: If you are open to these questions and challenges then we recommend that you move forward to the next steps. If not please spend some time better understanding the hesitations and if youth engagement is appropriate at this time. For more information about youth empowerment and the impacts and outcomes, check out the [YES! Youth Empowerment Model™](#).

Next Steps: Congratulations, you have made the collective decision to intentionally engage youth! Now let's get started in thinking through how to prepare your meetings and work to build successful relationships and meaningful outcomes.

Setting the Agenda:

- Think through what you are wanting to achieve at this meeting/event – how will engaging youth enhance your agenda
- Make sure to identify how you envision engaging youth at your meetings – what does meaningful engagement look like to you? (i.e. youth & adults problem-solving together, talking about solutions and opportunities, youth taking the lead on facilitation or projects)
- Leave time to build meaningful relationships – start meetings with a team building activity, opportunities to share stories, ice breakers, etc. – to support effective community work we must build trust among adults and youth – leave time for that

- Create specific places where the youth are speaking and/or giving feedback and reflections
- Consider creating a space for youth to report out or present to the group about the work they are doing (make sure they know about this before the meetings – so they have adequate time to prepare)
- Think through ways you might ask the youth for ideas about next steps and how they can take ownership of those next steps
- If possible, notify and/or prepare the adults who will be attending so that they can bring meaningful questions to engage with the youth

Reflections: How you incorporate youth into your meeting agenda is very important – if youth are engaged throughout the meeting they will more likely be more engaged. If there are specific opportunities for leadership/public speaking opportunities they will build confidence and it will create opportunities for youth-adult dialogue. Always make sure the youth know ahead of time the agenda and expectations.

Once the agenda has been created, let's think through how we want the meeting space to look, operate, and function to reach maximum engagement of all youth & adult participants.

Create a supportive environment:

- Think about the physical layout of the meeting space, this is important to create a healthy and productive environment
- Consider making sure youth can sit beside adults that they know and/or are comfortable working with, this will allow the youth to ask adults quick questions throughout without derailing or slowing down the larger meeting
- Be aware of the jargon that you are using in meetings – the public health sector and other professions use a lot of jargon, think through how to share that information and/or get youth up to speed before or during meetings
- Be mindful about how backtracking and explaining deliberately for a specific person can be disempowering if done without consideration – try having an adult person set the stage in the beginning of the meeting that they will check in with everyone to see if youth and adults have questions and comments and remember to check in to support the conversation and development of all involved
- Ask youth for feedback and remember that their feedback isn't personal and they are continuing to learn and grow their communication skills

Reflections: Think about youth leaders experience in large settings and be supportive and understanding if they don't have meaningful input during the first couple of meetings, if they use slang and/or slow down the meetings a bit. This is a long-term process and once dynamic relationships are established youth will become more open and engaged.

Extra ideas/items to consider as you move this work forward – we wish you the best of luck!

Additional Things to Consider:

- Provide food and snacks at meetings if they are going to last longer than 1- hour
- Support youth to take notes and/or write on flip chart paper when they are comfortable
- Think about next steps after meetings – how will you continue to engage youth moving forward?
- If there are action items being established for work done after the meeting, make sure that youth are meaningfully plugged in to those items.