



## FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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### MODULE 7:

# Youth Participation



## PART 1

# Reflect

Exercises and ideas to  
help you think about your  
own beliefs and practices



## ACTIVITY

# How can youth lead?

Read each statement below and reflect upon whether you think youth can lead in this area:

- Youth can be on boards
- Youth can do budgets
- Youth can hire staff
- Youth can plan events
- Youth can run meetings

### Think about your answers.

- What are your assumptions about what youth can and cannot do?
- Why do you hold these assumptions?
- Where might you be wrong?



# Mattering & Youth Participation

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Think about how you felt when you recalled a time when you mattered in the opening reflection.

Often youth feel like they matter when they are allowed to participate meaningfully in the activities that surround them at home, in school, and in music programs.

Youth Participation is another key concept of the Youth Development Approach. Young people are invested and build positive developmental outcomes when they can be involved in meaningful participation.



# Reflection Questions

Think about the various ways you/your program interact/s with young people. Brainstorm answers to the following questions:



## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Where are you demonstrating that you are also still learning as an adult?

How do you ensure that you're offering moments for youth to provide feedback on how they best learn?

## PARTICIPATING IN PROGRAMS

What are some ways your program ensures that young people are engaged in choosing what topics to focus on?

What types of group settings does your program offer that allow for more youth engagement/participation?

What other questions do you have about engaging young people and encouraging their full participation?

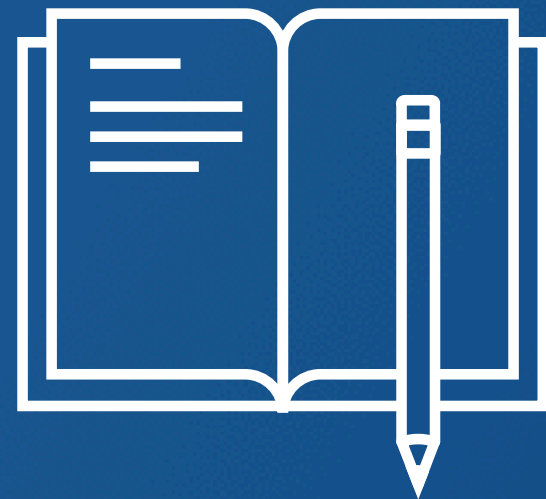
## RUNNING YOUR ORGANIZATION

Where do you see young people making decisions that have impact beyond the program they are engaged in? Does this happen at your organization?

## ENGAGING IN THE WORLD

What are some examples you have seen firsthand where young people are making their own decisions — large or small? *Hint: think about everything from playgrounds to political movements.*





## PART 2

# Learn

Definitions and frameworks to  
help deepen your understanding

# Youth Participation Definition

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Youth participation means young people having the power to make and implement decisions and changes, with a shared responsibility for the results. Youth participation is happening when young people are involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive change in themselves, their communities, and the world.

## **PLANNING & DECISION-MAKING**

This means involving youth in planning and in making decisions that affect themselves and others.

## **YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS**

Youth engagement happens in youth-adult partnerships that are structured so that both groups contribute, teach, and learn from each other.

*(Adapted from HRiA's BEST Initiative and Act for Youth)*





# Framework: Levels of Youth Participation

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Below are levels for engaging young people in your program:

| LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT   | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>None</b>           | Youth are not included.                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Tokenism</b>       | Adults set the agenda and make decisions. One or two young people may be consulted or visible, but their views are not necessarily considered. |
| <b>Consultation</b>   | Adults consult young people within adult parameters.                                                                                           |
| <b>Representation</b> | A select number of youth are put forward by their peers to work in collaboration with adults.                                                  |
| <b>Participation</b>  | Youth set the agenda, decide on issues and activities, and have joint accountability with adults.                                              |
| <b>Self-Managing</b>  | Youth work with little or no adult authority.                                                                                                  |

*(Adapted from the Northern Ireland Youth Council)*



# Framework: Checklist for Youth-Adult Partnerships

- ☐ Is the purpose of the youth-adult partnership clear, mutually understood, and valuable to both the youth and adult participants?
- ☐ Are the standards of group and meeting behavior clear to each member?
- ☐ Are the location and time of meetings and events convenient to all youth and adults?
- ☐ Do all members attend all meetings?
- ☐ Is involvement open to anyone who has an interest?
- ☐ Does each member feel comfortable and respected in being him/her/themselves?
- ☐ Are members comfortable expressing their ideas when they choose to speak?
- ☐ Does each member feel a sense of ownership for the group?
- ☐ Do members feel they have unique or important skills or qualities that contribute to the group?
- ☐ Do members find their involvement challenging and positive?
- ☐ Are members rewarded for their participation?
- ☐ Are meetings jointly facilitated by youth and adults?
- ☐ Are the expectations of each group participant clear and realistic to their maturity and skill level?
- ☐ Are there opportunities available for members to practice and develop skills that, in turn, allow them to make meaningful contributions?
- ☐ Are members allotted adequate time to prepare for presentations, meetings, and activities?
- ☐ Is sufficient training provided that allows youth and adults to work together and be productive?
- ☐ Is the adult-to-youth ratio adequate for assuring a collaborative partnership between adults and youth?

*(Adapted from Alternatives, Partners with Youth and AED/Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Washington, DC)*





# Framework: Core Principles for Working with Young People

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## **LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE**

- Really listen, with an open mind.
- Support their thinking. Welcome young people's ideas.

## **ENCOURAGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP**

- Control your tendency to take over both conversation and leadership.
- When you make suggestions, do so in the form of a question.
- Encourage young people to take responsibility and leadership where adults might normally do so.

## **HOLD HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

- Really listen, with an open mind.
- Support their thinking. Welcome young people's ideas.

## **BE AUTHENTIC**

- Young people want to know there are adults who care about them.
- Young people respect adults who show integrity and are consistent.
- Building relations is crucial and young people value healthy relationships with responsible adults.
- Never lie to them. We need to give young people real information about the way the world works, about experiences, and about relationships.

## **EXERCISE UNDERSTANDING**

- No matter what age, remember that we were all young once.
- Growing up is not the easiest time in a person's life. Have compassion for the daily challenges that young people face.
- Respect each young person, no matter their age, and expect them to respect each other, at all ages.

## **HAVE FUN**

- Young people love to laugh.
- It keeps us all young!

*(Adapted from Tomorrow Is Ours: An Organizing Handbook for Young People.  
Children of War, 85 So. Oxford St., Brooklyn, NY)*





## PART 3

# Observe

Spotlight on programs and projects that use a youth development approach



# Program Spotlight: Youth Action Hour

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## YOUTH ACTION HOUR

Youth Action Hour is a youth-of-color led media program that amplifies the power of young leaders across the USA. Starting in 2023, Youth Action Hour will host in-person and hybrid events focused on gathering communities for solutions-oriented conversations focused on transformative change. Building on its success as a national, digital-only series launched in January 2021, Youth Action Hour remains on a mission to empower and mobilize their communities.

An adult advisory panel helps open doors, but Youth Action Hour teens make all decisions about content, budget, and events. They create media content addressing issues that young people are facing — from civic engagement and education access to climate change and economic equity. The youth-led team has created a work culture that allows members to feel comfortable and be themselves, with adults who know when to get out of the way.

“We’ve been meeting young people where we are — social media. Our goal is to amplify the voices of young people who are demanding transformative change. The future will be our responsibility. It only makes sense for us to actively shape it to support ourselves and the generations that come after us.”

— **YOUTH ACTION  
HOUR PARTICIPANT**



Watch [this video](#) of Youth Action Hour participants talking about their work.

# Youth Action Hour

IF YOU HAVE A PREMIUM OR SIGN UP FOR A FREE TRIAL RUN  
YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THIS VIDEO FROM YOUTUB AND WE CAN  
INSERT IT HERE



## ACTIVITY

# Youth Participation Examples

List below the examples you hear in the video of Youth Participation.

| EXAMPLE | TYPE OF PARTICIPATION |
|---------|-----------------------|
|         |                       |
|         |                       |
|         |                       |
|         |                       |
|         |                       |
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# Project Spotlight: Show Us The Money Youth Panel

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## SHOW US THE MONEY YOUTH PANEL

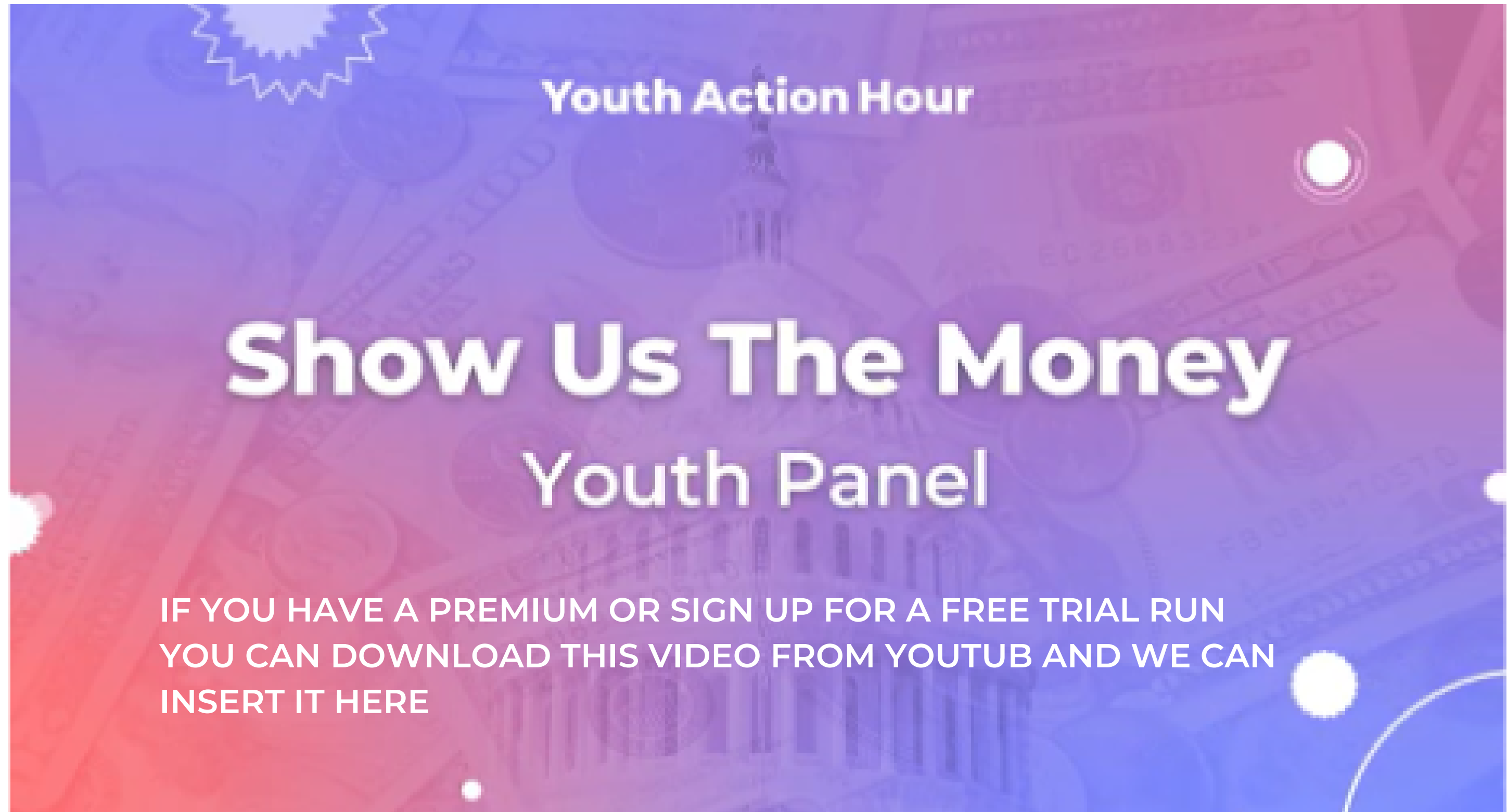
The Show Us The Money Youth Panel features a youth panel discussing the state of the Build Back Better Act as of November 18, 2021. Hosted by Luis Bautista (Opportunity Youth United), the Show Us The Money panelists are Gnora Gumanow (Alliance for Youth Action) and Wally Mazon (Sunrise Movement). In this video, they reflect on how negotiations have been handled and discuss what was promised and cut.

“Now is the time for elected officials to hear what we have to say about our future because any policy that does not explicitly designate young people as a priority is unlikely to reach them.”

— YOUTH ACTION HOUR PARTICIPANT



Watch the [youth panel](#).

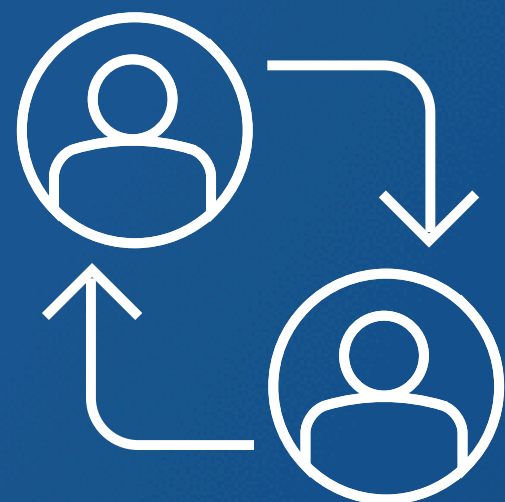


# Reflection Questions

## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Are there ways these young people are leading that surprise you?
- What services, opportunities, and supports do the youth in your program need to lead in a similar way?





## PART 4

# Engage

Reflection and planning tools to move towards implementation

# Reflection Tool: Youth Participation Scorecard

What is your organization doing to center young people and increase youth engagement? Circle the number that corresponds with your answer.

**Promotional materials are youth friendly.**

1 — Strongly Disagree — 2 — Disagree — 3 — Don't Know — 4 — Agree — 5 — Strongly Agree

**Meetings are scheduled around young people's needs.**

1 — Strongly Disagree — 2 — Disagree — 3 — Don't Know — 4 — Agree — 5 — Strongly Agree



The meeting location is accessible, consistent, and youth friendly.



Young people know what is expected of them and their role is clear.



There are incentives, such as food, stipends, or volunteer service hours available.



We engage at least 2 young people.



**We are committed to keeping young people at the table.**



**We set time aside for young people to speak at meetings, but don't put them on the spot.**



**We use terms young people are familiar with and avoid acronyms.**



**We check in with the youth to make sure we're on the same page.**



**We approach young people with respect and understanding.**



**Young people are included in key decision-making meetings.**





# Planning Tool: Youth Participation — Bump It Up!

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Review your selections on the previous pages, and choose two items that you would like to focus on to increase youth participation in your organization.

Write down how youth are currently participating, and 1-3 concrete ideas that would increase, or “Bump Up,” the level of youth participation in that area:

## ASK YOURSELF:

- How youth are participating now (include the “level of youth participation” if you like)?
- What are ideas to “Bump Up” youth participation?





## PART 5

# Research

Resources to further  
your learning



# Resources

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**“Participation & Decision Making,”**

**Northern Ireland Youth Forum**

<https://www.niyf.org/participation-decision-making/>

**“Guidelines for Program Implementation,” Fund for the City of NY Youth Development, Institute Networks for Youth Development, “Youth Development Institute (YDI) Resources,” Youth Development Institute at Ramapo for Children**

<https://www.ydinstitute.org/supportus>

**The Wallace Foundation, “From Access to Equity: Making Out-of-School-Time Spaces Meaningful for Teens From Marginalized Communities”**

<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/from-access-to-equity-making-out-of-school-time-spaces-meaningful-for-teens-from-marginalized-communities.pdf>

**Act for Youth: Your Online Source for Positive Youth Development, “What is Youth Engagement, Really?”**

[https://actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/engagement/](https://actforyouth.net/youth_development/engagement/)



Thank You!

