

# Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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## Definitions

**Youth voice:** Ensuring youth voice requires creating opportunities for youth to share their needs, ideas, and opinions with others.

**Enabling environment:** An environment that develops and supports young people's assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities and strengthens their ability to stay safe, secure, and protected and live without fear of violence or retribution. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term "environment" should be interpreted broadly and includes: social (e.g., relationships with peers and adults), normative (e.g., attitudes, norms, and beliefs), structural (e.g., laws, policies, programs services, and systems) and physical (e.g., safe, supportive spaces).

Source: *Youth Power*, [Youth Engagement Measurement Guide](#)

**Meaningful youth engagement:** An inclusive, intentional, and mutually respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, and policies that affect their lives.

Source: *Youth Power*, [Positive Youth Development \(PYD\) Framework](#)

## Engaging Youth Across the Program Cycle

**Q** Why and how can we engage youth throughout the program cycle?

**A** Youth have become the largest population in most developing countries.<sup>1</sup> As the number of young people increases, so will their influence on their country's economic, political, and social context. Therefore, we need to prioritize thinking about how we create informed youth who contribute positively to their environment. One important way to do so is to engage youth in the different phases of an organization's programs. Involving youth throughout the program cycle is beneficial for the youth themselves, for the program, and for the broader community. By participating in programs, youth gain knowledge and soft and technical skills that they can use outside the program. In addition, young people often bring innovative ideas and positive energy that could increase the impact of the program. Organizations that elicit and incorporate youth input and feedback into programs ensure that their activities reflect beneficiary needs. Improving youth engagement also creates stronger bonds between youth and older generations, which can lead to a more positive environment in the community.

### What is meaningful youth engagement?

There are a few different models that are commonly used to explain the levels of youth engagement and the progression from viewing youth as solely beneficiaries to youth as partners in decision-making and then as leaders.<sup>2</sup> Youth engagement in a program is a continuum: at the beginning, the program should focus on creating space and opportunities for youth to share opinions; and by the end, the program is enabling youth to take the lead by initiating and implementing their own ideas. Where on the continuum the organization's efforts to engage youth fall will depend on the program being implemented or what stage it is in within the program cycle; it may not be feasible for an organization to currently implement the highest level of youth engagement for all aspects of a

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Policy, [Here Come the Young](#)

<sup>2</sup> There are various definitions and tools to describe the progression of youth participation. For example, [Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation](#) describes participation as 8 steps beginning with youth being invited to contribute but not having their opinions valued; the highest forms of participation include youth-led action and joint decision making between youth and adults. [DFID](#) uses a three-lens approach which highlights the different roles youth can play in a project: as beneficiaries, as partners who are consulted on development interventions, and as leaders.

## Resources

[Youth Engagement in Development: Effective Approaches and Action-Oriented Recommendation for the Field](#)

[Youth Engagement Measurement Guide](#)

[Youth Engagement in PYD Programs](#)

[Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation](#)

[Youth in the Program Cycle: Activity Design & Implementation](#)

[Roger Hart Ladder of Participation](#)

[Putting young people at the heart of development: The Department for International Development's Youth Agenda \(UK aid\)](#)

[Youth Involvement in Evaluation and Research](#)

[Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-Led Research Projects](#)

[Participatory Action Research: A 'how to' guide for use with adolescents in humanitarian contexts](#)

program cycle. Rather, it is more important to view each of the steps as a building block, determining where the organization is currently and how it can reach the next level of youth engagement. Below is a simplified version of youth engagement that incorporates the main principles behind youth engagement into four building blocks:

1. **Youth Voice** – Programs working with youth should create opportunities to listen and understand youth needs, ideas, opinions, and perspectives; and provide effective platforms for youth to express themselves.
2. **Youth in Decision-Making** – Programs should provide youth with opportunities to participate in decision-making and allow them to gradually take on greater decision-making roles.
3. **Youth as Contributors and Change Agents** – When youth are empowered, they can become advocates for themselves and for others. Contribution may include advocacy efforts on the sub-national or national level, volunteering in the community, problem-solving issues in the community, etc.
4. **Youth as Leaders** – This is the highest level of youth engagement, where youth are initiating and implementing activities independently or with high levels of autonomy.

Engaging youth as leaders is the ultimate goal, but important groundwork is needed to ensure that young people become successful leaders:

- Youth need to be prepared with the skills and voice to advocate for themselves and others and empowered to own program goals and activities.
- Involved adults need to value youth voice and accept youth as actors and partners in development.
- Organizations and projects should ensure youth can meaningfully engage at all these levels, by offering opportunities for youth-led or youth-driven activities, on topics that are meaningful to them. It is crucial that youth see their participation as valuable and that organizations are careful not to create an environment of tokenism, where youth are included in discussions but their input is not internalized into the organization's ideas or actions.

## Engaging youth in each phase of the program cycle

### Design Phase

**Why?** Engaging youth in the design of an organization's program ensures that the organization incorporates into the design the perspectives, context, and needs of the youth beneficiaries it is trying to serve. Youth often contribute innovative ideas that may be appealing to both their peers and donors. By providing space

### Tip for including youth in design

Create an environment where youth feel comfortable contributing new ideas. This includes empowering youth through a soft skills training that teaches communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and presentation, as well as preparing adults in the room to actively listen to youth suggestions.

for youth to participate in program design, an organization creates greater youth ownership of the program, increasing the likelihood of young people's active participation in activity implementation and ensuring better program results.

**How?** Youth can be involved in multiple aspects of designing programs and activities, including participating in or leading assessments, analyzing results, and brainstorming ideas.

Youth-led or youth-inclusive needs assessments are an effective tool for engaging youth in project design. Through these assessments, organizations can ensure stronger youth voice by including a diverse segment of youth as part of focus groups and key informant interviews. (For more information on engaging different segments of youth, see the *Implementation Tip* on Developing Tailored Youth Activities.) Organizations can move beyond engaging youth as assessment participants to including them in *decision-making* around how assessment questions are defined and how key informants are identified.

In addition, methodologies such as [Community Youth Mapping](#) (CYM) encourage youth to become *key contributors* to the program and the community by identifying and documenting resources, needs, and opportunities in their communities and sharing the findings with key stakeholders in the organization and community. As part of this process, youth should be trained on soft and technical skills so they are prepared to engage with different members of the community and to analyze and present the data they collect. CYM findings can be used to inform program design and help youth identify activities that they want to initiate, implement, and lead on their own.

### Implementation Phase

**Why?** Continuing to engage youth during program implementation ensures that the program continues to reflect youth interests and needs. Allowing youth to act as leaders during program implementation also increases the youth retention rate, as young people are better positioned to motivate their peers to attend and participate in activities; enhances youth skill building; extends program reach and impact. If youth are involved in implementing the program – particularly as partners and not just as beneficiaries – they may also help find ways to make the program more sustainable so they can continue the activities even after funding has ended.

**How?** Youth can take a variety of roles when implementing programs, ranging from providing input on how to implement activities to participating in programmatic and organizational decision making.

- **Input on program activities** – Provide opportunities for youth to voice their opinions on ongoing program activities. Lower levels of contributing to program activities (i.e., on Roger Hart's Ladder) include providing youth with a few options on program time/place

## Tip for involving youth in implementation

Invest time and resources to train young people on how to actively contribute to the program, organization, and community. This may start with small steps, such as asking youth for input on a set of choices, then building to having youth provide the choices for staff to implement, and then building to youth-led initiatives with staff support, and finally expanding to the launch of initiatives that are completely led and implemented by youth.

## For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net).

The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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or activities and asking them to make a selection within a limited set of choices. These activities may then be led by staff or, more ideally, by the youth.

Higher levels of youth contribution include shared decision-making, in which youth provide the choices and/or staff and youth work together to brainstorm and select program activities.

The highest level of engagement is providing youth with opportunities to brainstorm and select which activities to implement, such as setting up new clubs or creating community service opportunities, and then having the youth initiate and lead activity implementation.

- **Youth advisory board** – Create an advisory board that gives youth a mechanism to participate in decision-making through which they can continuously influence program activities. This advisory board may use platforms to aggregate youth beneficiary feedback on the program and share this feedback with the staff. The board should also be engaged any time that the program staff are designing new activities or adapting ongoing ones and, at the highest level of engagement, could be engaged when making budgetary or resource allocation decisions.
- **Youth mentoring and peer education** – Motivate youth to become contributors by providing older youth or program alumni opportunities to mentor their peers, be they younger youth or others in their group. This approach can help provide vulnerable youth with additional support as they undertake new activities. It may also empower older youth to contribute to their community as leaders as they volunteer to help their peers.
- **Youth council** – Empower young people to be key contributors in their community by setting up a youth-run council through which they identify priority issues in the community and participate in decision-making at the community level. This may also include youth participating in local governance bodies.
- **Youth staff** – Capitalize on young people's skills and assets by hiring youth as staff. This builds youth capacity and also contributes to a more enabling environment for young program participants who might find it easier to relate to and communicate with staff closer to their age.

## Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

**Why?** Providing youth opportunities to monitor and evaluate programs builds their skill set while creating a strong feedback loop in which youth can provide input on activities. Youth Participatory Evaluations (YPEs) build young people's soft and technical skills, increase their involvement in the organization and/or community, and

## Tip for involving youth in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

If M&E work is new to the youth, provide them with simple monitoring tools, such as scorecards or checklists, so that they know exactly what information they are looking for and how the data should be recorded. Always ask for youth feedback on the tool and adapt accordingly. If youth are already comfortable with M&E, they may provide feedback on tools as they are created or even create the tools themselves.

can serve as a base for future advocacy efforts.<sup>3</sup> The more nuanced perspective of the involved youth can also provide the organization with additional information that may not otherwise have been available.

**How?** There are different ways to involve youth in monitoring and evaluation, including engaging youth in providing feedback and suggestions for current or past programs, participating in (or leading) the creation and utilization of data collection instruments, and analyzing data:

- **Youth feedback loops:** Give youth a voice in monitoring and evaluating programs by providing set opportunities whereby youth can provide feedback and suggestions on activities.
- **Youth participatory evaluation:** Provide opportunities for youth to be involved in assessing programs or activities they are involved in. This may involve adults requesting information/data from youth participants through surveys or focus group discussions (low level of youth engagement) to youth validating tools or assisting in creating the evaluation tools (medium level of youth engagement) to youth designing and administering the evaluation instruments and analyzing results (high level of youth engagement).<sup>4</sup>
- **Youth audit or scorecard:** Engage youth in decision-making by asking a group of youth to lead an assessment of youth inclusion and engagement across an entire organization and its programs, including systems, people/staffing, programs, and governance. Elevate youth as leaders by training them on the methodologies and providing them an opportunity to design the questions and structures of the tools, use them during data collection, and then analyze the findings.<sup>5</sup>
- **Hire youth data collectors and/or researchers:** If hiring outside data collectors, consider hiring youth and training them in the necessary skills.

3 Search for Common Ground, [Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-led Research Projects](#)

4 Act for Youth, [Youth Participatory Evaluation](#)

5 Youth scorecards and audits can also be integrated into the implementation of programming as opposed to as a separate M&E activity. For example, in a civic engagement program, youth may lead the scorecard process to determine to what extent service delivery is being implemented.

