

# Youth Leadership/Development Domain

## Literature Review

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### Key Words:

Change Agent  
Civic Advocacy  
Sense of Community  
Service Learning  
Youth Development  
Youth Governance  
Youth Infusion  
Youth Leadership  
Youth Organizing

Youth development and leadership in City Heights, Cherokee Point neighborhood, will increase human and social capital through the 90 hours Semester of Leadership followed by the 90 hour Semester of Service. Developing their skill sets with holistic, comprehensive curriculum, including training for their roles as elected on decision making bodies, will increase their quality of life for themselves, their family, and their community. Enhanced Sense of Community with youth as equal partners and vested stakeholders will impact the transformation of the community to a safe, culture of caring.

Creating, designing, implementing, and evaluating their sustainable service learning projects with emphasis on the Specific Aim of Social Justice will impact policy change and organizational change. Youth being developed as the next generation of parents and leaders will profoundly assist in effectively transforming the punitive systems from “fear based” to “heart based”.

### **Youth In Decision Making**

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth\\_in\\_Decision\\_Making\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth_in_Decision_Making_Brochure.pdf)

69 page Report, (2000) Research on Practice

The research report on practice depicted below, Youth in Decision Making, bolsters empirical data with researchers previous knowledge, plus knowledge gleaned from existing literature. Little research exists to address important questions regarding youth in decision-making roles. A strong case—supported by research—can be made that involving youth in decision-making is good for young people’s development. There are, however, almost no studies that explore how adults benefit when involved in shared decision-making with young people. Even less research studies the effects of youth participation on organizational decision-making, board or commission deliberations, or community change processes. This study was designed to address those gaps.

Imperative to note the themes permeating throughout the report stating;

- Youth bring under-represented groups into organizational decision making.
- Youth provide strategies for ensuring diverse populations.
- Youth serving organizations benefit from client/consumer representation on their Board.
- Youth bring curiosity, creativity, willingness to take risks, and a desire to be where the action is.
- Youth are human capital who offers tremendous and untapped contribution and potential.
- Youth bring a sense of community.
- Youth desire continuous clarification of what is important and continuous learning to see current reality more clearly.
- Youth develop sense of their own value by having opportunities to be of value to others. (1)
- Youth’s investment in civic advocacy has commitment and energy when they feel they are on a mission or supporting a cause.(2)
- Youth driven organizations include social activism as one of their primary purposes.(3)

With the Data collection occurring in two phases, the primary focus of the first phase was exploring the range of outcomes that might be attributed to youth involvement in decision-making. From the empirical data, analyses were conducted to identify patterns in the perceptions and practices of those interviewed. For the second phase of the study, the focus shifted to identifying the organizational practices that contributed to positive outcomes. Using the extended case method as the analysis strategy, the method bolsters empirical data with the researchers’ previous knowledge as well as knowledge gleaned from existing literature.

Beginning by testing the practice-based theories of the field and comparing them with findings generated from our research. Additionally, they integrated the organizational context of each interview into the analysis. Thus, the analysis is based not only on the individual accounts and experiences of respondents but is also anchored in existing theory and research.

In addition, they used the strategy of informant checks to analyze and verify our data. A draft version of the study was sent to all participating organizations. Adults and youth were asked to identify (a) errors of fact and of quotation, and (b) errors of interpretation. Additionally, youth-adult pairs from a few organizations were asked to provide a written response to be included in the final report.

Since the industrial age, adolescents have largely remained marginalized in community decision-making processes, and infrequently invited to engage in collective problem-solving. This isolation creates social contexts where negative stereotypes may flourish, and results in few opportunities for youth and adults to work in partnership. Further, these contexts and stereotypes have been sustained by policies that assume young people are unable or unwilling to contribute to the common good.

Beginning in the decade of the 90's, an impressive array of models that integrate youth more fully into the decision-making processes of organizations, collaborations, and public institutions are witnessed. Unfortunately, research has not kept pace with the advances of practice. Although it is clear that bringing youth to the table can have powerful, positive impacts on young people, there is no research to address its effects on adults. This report reflects the following aspects on behalf of research;

- Research can address accountability concerns. It can empirically substantiate best practices and provide additional substance to practitioner wisdom. It offers a test of current assumptions and raises new issues.
- Research can propel dissemination processes. Unfortunately, relatively few youth are engaged in civic participation and a small minority of organizations engages youth in governance roles. Research-based materials can add clarity and definition to those who wish to involve youth but who do not know where or how to begin the work in their own communities.
- Research-based knowledge offers a different type of legitimacy than practitioner knowledge. Combined, the two can offer the most convincing message. Research knowledge is often written. It is easily accessed when information is needed for advocacy or fund-raising purposes.

Language describing youth involvement in decision-making in organizations, institutions, and coalitions depicts the following:

**Youth infusion** refers to the fundamental goal: to integrate youth and young adults into all spheres of community life and to ensure that their voice and action are valued and utilized in efforts aimed at social or community change. At the organizational level, an institution is "infused" when youth are valued as effective partners and when structures are created at multiple levels to ensure that the voice of young people is represented in decision-making.

**Youth governance (or youth decision-making)** is a fundamental and core strategy of youth infusion. It refers to those situations where youth work—often in partnership with adults—to set the overall policy direction of organizations, institutions, and coalitions. Youth decisions may be administrative (e.g. hiring staff, designing programs, or conducting needs assessments) or operational (e.g., leading youth groups or training volunteers.) These terms often refer to young people working on boards of directors, sanctioned committees, planning bodies, and advisory groups. Most organizations define youth and young people as people between the ages of twelve and twenty-one. We use the parameters of eleven to twenty-four.

Effective Organizational Decision-Making Bodies require a youth-adult partnership synergy with represents contributions from the youth and adults respectively. Several aspects were clarified within this body of research on practice.

#### ***(A) Youth Contributions***

Young people can be exemplary members of governance bodies. During adolescence, many young people are driven to explore issues of social justice and are creating and experimenting with their own principles and political ideas. Leading many to become involved in cause-based action, consequently, in many organizations, the young people become the keepers of the vision. They are the ones who focus on the mission.

Young people often speak their minds and bring a fresh perspective to organizational decision-making. Adults commented on how young people changed the content and quality of discourse and procedure on governing boards, commissions, and other planning bodies. Young people bring a first-hand knowledge of youth.

#### ***(B) Adult Contributions***

Adults can also be exemplary members of governance bodies, especially when they are prepared and motivated to work collaboratively with young people. Adulthood is a time of generativity, a time to pass on one's knowledge and skill to the next generation. Feelings of community and connection again take on greater importance as adults reach mid-life. The young people and adults in this study most often used words such as guidance and support when describing the contributions of adults. Young people especially value the lessons adults bring from other organizations; they often seek out the advice, instruction, and direction that adults can offer.

#### ***(C) Synergy: Youth-Adult Partnerships for Effective Decision-Making***

The mutual contributions of youth and adults can result in a synergy, a new power and energy that propels decision-making groups to greater innovation and productivity. Youth and adults become more committed to attending meetings and create a climate that is grounded in honest appraisal, reflection, and ongoing learning.

#### ***(D) Youth Outcomes***

This study did not explore the effects of decision-making on the youth themselves. This issue has been studied in the past, and results are conclusively positive. Involving young people in decision-making provides them with the essential opportunities and supports (i.e. challenge, relevancy, voice, cause-based action, skill-building, adult structure, and affirmation) that are consistently shown to help young people achieve mastery, compassion, and health. It is exactly these developmental opportunities and supports that (should) characterize shared decision-making between youth and adults in organizations. In the organizations studied, the young people prospered when decision-making had these qualities.

### ***(E) Adult Outcomes***

Most of the adults we interviewed had never worked collaboratively with youth for a common goal over an extended period of time. This study demonstrates that adults benefit from working with youth in four primary ways.

1. Adults experienced the competence of youth first-hand, and began to perceive young people as legitimate, crucial contributors to organizational decision-making processes.
2. Working with youth served to enhance the commitment and energy of adults to the organization.
3. Adults felt more effective and more confident in working with and relating to youth.
4. Adults came to understand the needs and concerns of youth, and became more attuned to programming issues, making them more likely to reach outside the organization and share their new knowledge and insights. They gained a stronger sense of community connectedness.

### ***(F) Organizational Outcomes***

Involving youth in decision-making helps change organizations for the better. Six positive outcomes were identified.

1. The principles and practices of youth involvement became embedded within the organizational culture.
2. Most organizations found that young people help clarify and bring focus to the organization's mission, and some organizations made this a formal role of youth.
3. The adults and the organizations as a whole became more connected and responsive to youth in the community. This investment and energy led to programming improvements.
4. Organizations placed a greater value on inclusivity and representation. They came to see that their programming benefits when multiple and diverse community voices are included in decision-making processes.
5. Having youth as decision-makers helped convince foundations and other funding agencies that the organization was serious about promoting youth development.
6. Including youth in decision-making led organizations to reach out to the community in more diverse ways (e.g. community advocacy, policy-making, and service.)

### ***(G) Community Outcomes***

This study did not consistently identify community-level outcomes that could be attributable to youth and adults making decisions together. This was due to two factors. First, the vast majority of organizations in this study had not engaged young people in decision-making roles for extended periods of time—typically, less than three or four years. They were still focused internally, learning how to make the organizational shifts necessary to support youth governance and were not looking out into the community. Second, expanding community capacity means that a variety of organizations and agencies have to involve young people in decision-making. This has not yet happened. Community capacity outcomes probably will not become readily detectable until young people are infused in decision-making contexts across multiple organizations and agencies.

As more organizations adopt youth governance into their operating philosophy in the future, a critical mass of expertise will grow. Eventually communities will experience a cultural shift.

### ***Findings: (H) Creating Conditions for Organizational Change***

This research stresses that these processes and positive outcomes do not occur naturally, and are not in the repertoire of most organizations and communities. There are many reasons why young people are rarely involved in organizational decision-making, ranging from cultural stereotypes to the lack of supporting policies and structures.

Nonetheless, the organizations in this study were successful in bringing the voices and ideas of young people to the governance table. As expected, some organizations were far more effective in this regard than others. Our research identifies the following conditions as being most likely to facilitate positive outcomes:

1. The top decision-making body in the organization needs to be committed to youth governance and youth-adult partnerships, and must change their ways of operating accordingly. The data is clear: If a governance body is focused on vision and learning, there is room for young people to make substantial contributions. If it is more traditionally focused on rule making and management, then it is less likely that young people will have a significant influence on the board.
2. Organizational change is facilitated by an adult visionary leader, one with institutional power and authority, to strongly advocate for youth decision-making. Without this leadership, traditional management structures and stereotypic views about young people are too powerful to overcome.
3. While an adult most often leads the initial change processes, the movement takes on greater power and influence as young people begin to organize and demand increasing participation in governance.
4. Adult views about young people are difficult to change, and this is true even for adults in governance positions. Change occurs when the organization offers three types of experiences to adults.
  - a) Adults perceived a good reason to work with youth. The governance work had to be purposefully oriented towards meaningful outcomes. Adult attitudes did not change when the decision-making was perceived as symbolic or tokenistic.
  - b) Adult attitude change occurs most readily when young people perform well in the boardroom, or in other places that adults regard as adults' turf. It is important for adults to witness youth succeeding in the nuts and bolts of organizational improvement.

c) Adults change their views of young people when they have the opportunity to observe youth engaged in community action that had real payoffs for community residents.

5. Organizational change occurs most rapidly when adults perceive the young people as effective decision-makers. For this reason, the young people who were nominated to take on key governance roles were selected carefully, just as the adults were. Most of the organizations had created a kind of scaffolding for youth to work their way up through the organization, engaging in a variety of leadership-building and decision making opportunities.

6. According to developmental research, organizations begin the change process by first involving older youth in governance roles. Age matters. A fourteen-year-old differs significantly from an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old across multiple domains (cognitive, physical, societal, psychological, economic, and legal). The organizations in this study recognize this difference. While decision-makers ranged in age from twelve to twenty-three, the majority fell between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. The mean age of those whom the organization chose to be their spokespersons for this study was eighteen years. It seems that the organization, in their desire to ensure the early success of youth governance, have decided to begin with older youth and to eventually integrate younger adolescents into governance.

To quote the report on **Sense of Community**, "Community connectedness is related to positive social relations, feelings of control and empowerment, and voluntary participation in neighborhood action. It contributes to neighborhood stability and growth". (4)

#### *Next Steps for Practice and Research*

Involving young people in organizational governance represents one of the most innovative strategies for promoting youth and community development. Unfortunately, adult attitudes and current organizational structures are not set up to support youth and adult partnerships in decision-making. The organizations in this study were working hard to overcome the barriers and to explore the potential of this strategy. Our data indicate that organizations can achieve an impressive array of positive outcomes when they make youth and adult partnerships an operational priority. Prolonging their dependency and segregating young people from the adult decision-making world contributes to and sustains stereotypes, resentment, and suspicion.

### ***Creating Change: How Organizations Connect with Youth, Build Communities, and Strengthen Themselves***

<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/CreatingChange.pdf>

24 page booklet, (2004)

The Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development's Mission is connecting people and ideas to create change. Their booklet is divided into two sections. The first, *Youth Development and Community Engagement*, explores ways that community organizations engage and support young people by involving them in community change. The second, *Community Organizations and Social Justice*, explores the conditions that organizations must create for young people to make their communities more just and equitable.

Their strategies and practices measured successful youth development by the following outcomes;

- Build young people's connections to their own identity, culture, and community
- Recognize that young people are assets to and experts about their own communities
- Engage young people as community leaders on issues that matter to them
- Bring young people and adults together to work as equal partners

#### **Youth Development and Community Engagement**

**Strategy 1:** Develop young people's connections to their own identity, culture, and community

**Strategy 2:** Recognize that young people are assets to and experts about their communities

**Strategy 3:** Engage young people as community leaders on issues that matter to them

**Strategy 4:** Bring young people and adults together to work as equal partners

#### **Community Organizations and Social Justice**

**Strategy 1:** Inspire action and partnership among all members of a community

**Strategy 2:** Develop the capacity of the organization to plan implement, and achieve its goal

**Strategy 3:** Create changes that can be sustained and supported over the long haul

Several youth leadership opportunities are highlighted in the booklet are noted below.

**LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE (LE)** is a youth development group in Oakland, California. LE uses identity as a starting point to develop a critical consciousness and cohesion among young African Americans.

**OUTRIGHT** in Portland, Maine provides social support, advocacy, and information to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth.

**HEALTHY COMMUNITIES-HEALTHY YOUTH INITIATIVE** in Waupaca, Wisconsin set a new standard when they developed and ran their own projects. Healthy Communities - Healthy Youth worked in partnership with adults, but it was clearly youth-led. Their accomplishments include:

- a new skateboard park for the town;
- volunteer opportunities at community organizations for sixth graders;
- a youth-led philanthropy committee(funded by the Kellogg Foundation) to offer local organizations grants in exchange for service projects that involve youth as partners;
- seats for young people as voting members of city council.

**YOUNG WOMEN'S PROJECT** in Washington, DC, offers hourly wages to teen leaders—many of whom have been in foster care—to show them that their work is valued. As experts on the foster care system and students in D.C. public schools, the young women bring a critical insider perspective to the organization. They identify key challenges facing their peers, educate policymakers, and advocate for solutions.

Thanks to their efforts, Washington, DC, now has:

- a sound sexual harassment policy in its public schools;
- systems and standards to ensure quality care in group foster homes.

**RESPECT TEAM** in Oxford Hills, Maine brings together high school students and adults to encourage tolerance, acceptance, compassion, respect, and responsibility—not just among young people, but everyone. This youth-adult partnership has inspired changes to its community and culture. [www.umext.maine.edu/counties/oxford.htm](http://www.umext.maine.edu/counties/oxford.htm)

**YOUTH UNITED FOR COMMUNITY ACTION (YUCA)** is an environmental justice organization with sites in East Palo Alto, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, California [www.youthunited.net](http://www.youthunited.net)

**COALITION FOR ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN YOUTH (CAPAY)**, a youth-led organization in Boston, create systems of documenting and evaluating its impact and effectiveness on projects to promoting justice in Asian communities. [www.capayus.org](http://www.capayus.org)

**YOUTH MINISTRIES FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE (YMPJ)**, in the Bronx, New York, mentors youth through four phases of acquiring leadership and organizing skills. Each phase builds on the last to deepen youth's understanding of their community and themselves and advances young people's organizing skills and commitment to social change. Young people progress through four phases: Arts and Activism, Education for Liberation, Compassionate Service, and Community Organizing. **(718) 328-5622**

### ***Youth Leadership for Development Initiative: Extending the Reach of Youth Development through Civic Activism***

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Extending\\_the\\_Reach.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Extending_the_Reach.pdf)

272 pages, (2004) Research Results

## **FILL IN AFTER GETTING PRINT OUT**

### ***Youth Engagement: A Celebration Across Time and Culture – Framing the Issue***

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth\\_Engagement\\_Framing\\_the\\_Issue.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth_Engagement_Framing_the_Issue.pdf)

10 pages, (2005), Promising Approaches Research

Crucially needed now in our society is a deep exploration of the roles of young people in creating positive change. Such an exploration will generate lessons of inclusive engagement, inform current work, and inspire and empower young people well into the future. This exploration of young people's place in society is the catalyst for an agenda for change.

Search Institute's 2005 report on Youth Engagement reflected the following eight pathways for effective youth engagement and partnership with the community. Their Promising Approaches are:

- Youth Service
- Youth Leadership
- Youth in Decision-Making
- Youth Philanthropy
- Youth Civic and Political Engagement
- Youth Organizing
- Youth Media

Within their Youth Research and Evaluation, they reflected on how successful youth-adult partnerships in collective learning, shared decision making models are effective, inspiring, and mutually interdependent. Specifically, Promising Approaches outlined depict youth leadership that responds to diversity and community needs through cross-generational opportunities where new understandings and possibilities are unleashed. With individual partners committing to the importance of crossing boundaries in true collaboration, the capacity building of developing relationships impacts the successful sustainability of the long term work contributing to the common good.

This research reflects the imperativeness of reframing the issue of youth engagement to include cross-cultural collaboration and youth-adult partnerships. Numerous drivers for this paradigm shift include:

1. Changing public perception will influence public discourse for youth advocacy, leading to increased funding and new opportunities.
2. New frames will create the climate for youth agencies and communities to re-examine the pathways and opportunities they create for youth engagement, and find more effective ways to engage young people in creating change on a personal, organizational, and community level.
3. Issue-focused community agencies (for example, organizations focused on environmental awareness, social service, etc.) will use the new frames to re-examine the role of young people in their agency and expand opportunities to engage young people as contributors to their work.

As adults and youth talk about making change, they are giving new meanings to words like “leadership,” “philanthropy,” and “empowerment.” The work will be strengthened if players (youth, adults, theorists, and funders) begin to coalesce around a common language that represents the best ideas, approaches, and elements of good practice.

Concepts such as youth participation in community research and evaluation, youth-led research, youth-led evaluation, and youth-led research and evaluation are commonly used to describe the phenomenon of young people’s engagement and assumption of leadership roles in community studies. Youth research and evaluation is a powerful strategy used to engage young people in the exploration of root causes to community issues and provides young people with processes to define and implement solutions.

Articulating **Youth Organizing** as an innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities. Youth organizing relies on the power and leadership of youth acting on issues defined by and affecting young people in their communities, and involves them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these efforts.

### Youth Engagement: A Celebration Across Time and Culture: Proceedings Summary

[http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth\\_Engagement\\_proceedingsSummary.pdf](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/files/Youth_Engagement_proceedingsSummary.pdf)

28 pages, (2000) Proven Practice & Promising Ideas

A historic summit, the 75th Anniversary seminar, Youth Engagement: A Celebration Across Time and Culture was held in Battle Creek, MI, from October 17 to 19, 2005. The dynamic seminar assembled a diverse community of youth activists and their adult partners from across various generations, cultures, and social movements to share, explore, and build on the lessons and experiences of youth engagement from the past to the present. Resulting in a specific call to action developed by youth participants, this call cited the urgent need for local communities, organizations, and individuals across the country to pursue an even greater level of youth engagement around positive community change.

With myriad venues of retrieving data, this booklet reflects a youth-adult documentation team being present at the event, interviewing participants around several of the seminar questions, collecting stories, recording insights, and distilling key points and opinions through updates in the form of a daily event newsletter. Participants responded to questions and discussions throughout the event via an online weblog. A youth-adult video documentation team from Llano Grande, TX, conducted interviews and captured activities on film that were shared daily at the event. A photographer collected images and a graphic artist created drawings throughout the event that pictorially summarized the essence of the seminar dialogue. The Foundation also sponsored an evaluation of the event, capturing participant perspectives on their key lessons and steps for follow-up action. Together these diverse methods produced a wealth of perspectives and experiences that were reviewed and analyzed to inform this paper.

It is clear that elder-youth dialogue holds much promise, in terms of being a strategy for strengthening the way young people and adults engage to create positive change. Denoting that mainstream leadership models have only recently begun addressing the need to work with youth to create change in communities with a long history of oppression. And, it is mainstream youth programming and media that is catching on to the potential that’s inherent in engaging disenfranchised young people in different ways.

Family, community, partnerships, and collaborations are all crucial to supporting youth engagement and positive social change. These groups—families of birth or choice, and partnerships of shared vision—all emerged through the seminar discussions as nurturing and challenging forces for positive change. Social change work is powered by individual spirit and emotion, so creating spaces where these motivators can be expressed, safely challenged, and developed is key.

Diversity, cooperation, support, and teamwork were all critical elements of success echoed repeatedly by participants. The focus of conversation on team work, collaboration and partnership was often established first on the personal relationship level. This contrasts with typical social change literature where cooperation and collaboration is more organizational, deemphasizing or ignoring the value of strategy about individuals coming together with their personal passions and dreams.

The challenge to the greater community remains however to generate awareness of the historic and current contributions that youth make to societal change, and for adults to acknowledge and embrace youth to a level commensurate with their significant contributions.

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