

Identifying Young People for Engagement Activities

Youth and young adult engagement benefits youth, adults, programs, and communities. Any program working with youth—whether local or national, clinics or schools, advocacy, or direct service—has a responsibility to engage young people in respectful and mutually beneficial ways, providing opportunities for young voices to have a profound impact.

Agencies that are newly considering youth engagement can struggle to identify young people who wish to participate. However, the effort is worthwhile. All communities have youth and young adults who are interested in improving their world.

Tips to Identify Youth and Young Adults

Look in Your Own Backyard

- Ask what roles participants, patients, or students in your program would like to play.

Researchers in academic settings have access to a highly engaged and available population of young adults studying at their institutions. Young people in these settings may be motivated by real-world experience in their field of interest.

Look Beyond Your Backyard

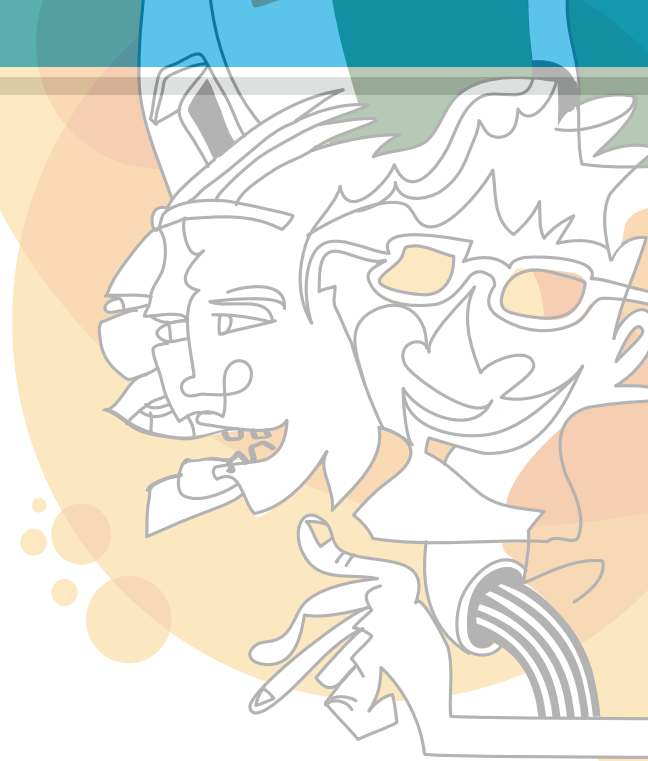
- Consider engagement practices that will recruit young people from outside your organization or community. Turn to social media campaigns, for example, or leverage the networks of other stakeholders in the field.
- Be flexible when scheduling meetings. To accommodate various schedules, meet during different times of the day or evening and on school holidays and weekends.
- Use virtual meeting platforms and conference calls, so transportation and logistics are not barriers to participation.

Consider Partnerships

- If your organization is struggling to identify young people to engage, leverage partnerships with organizations that are already engaging youth. (This struggle can be common among organizations that don't directly serve youth and young adults, such as advocacy organizations or research firms.)
- Tap into existing youth advisory boards for targeted, time-limited engagement or feedback.
- Use partner email lists and connections to disseminate recruitment materials.

“The idea of empowering youth made this work appealing for me, both now and when I was in high school. I didn’t realize when I was younger why I was attracted to serve in some, but not other, youth civic participation roles. Now I do understand why—it’s because I was being empowered and entrusted instead of tokenized and ordered.”

—Youth Advisory Board Member





“Stipends have been really helpful to engage me.”

—Youth Advisory Board Member

Encourage Diversity

- Pursue a balanced mix of participants instead of “first come, first served” or “most qualified” based on predetermined metrics like grades or prior leadership experience.
- Avoid working with the same young people over and over. Branching out yields a variety of perspectives and avoids tokenism.
- Consider both demographic and experiential diversity.

Actively Pursue Youth

- Work with youth to identify words and phrases as well as dissemination mechanisms and channels that are best for reaching others in their age group.

Use social media platforms to start conversations with youth interested in your program. Posting a flyer or putting out a sign-up sheet is unlikely to yield engaged young people.

- Offer incentives, such as honorariums, class credit, or professional development opportunities that address the needs and preferences of the youth you want to engage.

We would like to thank
the YESS youth advisory
board members
—especially Amritha Anup—
who contributed to the
development of these tips.

Substance use prevention and early intervention strategies for adolescents have historically been developed, implemented, and informed by adult perspectives. In an effort to bring youth and young adult voices together to transform how we think about these services and supports, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is partnering with the Center for Social Innovation (C4) to explore current status of and potential opportunities for youth engagement. Youth Engagement Strategies and Support (YESS) leverages the learning of pioneers in youth engagement and explores how these lessons can be applied to adolescent substance use prevention and early intervention.

Questions about YESS? Contact Rosie Donegan, Center for Social Innovation, rdonegan@center4si.com.