



# Youth Engagement 101

Building Youth-Adult Partnerships

## WHY INVOLVE YOUTH IN YOUR TOBACCO CONTROL WORK

**YOUTH ARE CONSTITUENTS.** They have a vested interest in their community, even though they are not yet able to vote.

**YOUTH BRING INCREDIBLE ENERGY TO A CAUSE!** This energy has the power and potential to open doors. Focus youth energy to help achieve mutual goals.

**YOUTH BRING A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE.** Strengthen your efforts and spark new ideas with a youth perspective. Youth have unique access to and credibility with their schools, friends, parents and other potential allies who can build and broaden tobacco control efforts.

## WHY YOUTH WOULD PARTICIPATE

**COMMUNITY PRIDE:** Even if there are problems in their community, the youth who will participate are still proud of where they live and want to create positive change.

**VOICE:** Youth will get the opportunity to express themselves and develop their voice.

**MENTORING:** Youth seek out role models and are eager to learn from adults.

**SKILL-BUILDING:** Youth have skills that can be honed and improved with help from you!

## WHERE TO RECRUIT YOUTH

- Online
- Schools
- Neighborhood hangouts
- Community centers
- Youth events
- Community events
- On- and off-campus clubs and organizations (i.e. 4H, Boys and Girls Clubs, Friday Night Live, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts)
- Sports teams and events

## HOW TO RECRUIT YOUTH

- Host events, have a pizza party
- Make presentations to: classes or clubs requiring community service, leadership classes, or after-school programs
  - Set up a table during lunch
  - Post in school announcements
  - Attend Freshman orientation
- Recruit during Red Ribbon Week activities
  - Participate in a club fair
  - Table at community events
  - Plan field trips
- Advertise: Post flyers, network on social media, or via word of mouth
  - Offer incentives (food, prizes, reference letters, stipends)



## WHAT YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS CAN DO EVERYTHING THAT ANY DEDICATED GROUP CAN ACCOMPLISH:

- Support and/or evaluate efforts through data collection.
- Educate the public on the issues.
- Share visuals and stories to change community norms.
- Advocate for policy change through meeting with decision-makers, writing letters, etc.
- Engage the community to recruit more advocates.
- Develop messaging for media efforts online, in op-eds and advertisements, and at press conferences.



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## HOW TO MANAGE SUCCESSFUL YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

**FIND A MOTIVATED ADVISOR:** This person could be staff, a consultant, student intern (either paid or volunteer), or contract with an experienced youth organization. An advisor should be friendly and respectful of youth, as well as a skilled facilitator, good listener, positive role model, good communicator. The best advisors are patient, understanding, honest, persistent, flexible, and optimistic.

**HAVE PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS:** Youth should always feel welcome, heard, and valued, whether you are building a youth group or a mixed youth-adult coalition. New members should always be recognized, thanked, and welcomed. Discuss goals and meeting organization and come to a consensus. Agree to meeting schedules with the group. Sub-groups can be created for specific projects. These groups may meet more frequently than the whole group. Partnerships meeting weekly or twice per month have higher retention than those meeting monthly or more infrequently. Revisit meeting schedules, structure, and goals periodically to ensure that they are still working for the partnership. Don't forget to have fun!

There are many ways to organize meetings: Any leadership style, from parliamentary to chaotic, can work as long as the group agrees.

- Adult facilitator: Adult advisor leads meetings.
- Limited: Youth and adult advisor share responsibilities for meetings.
- Chairs: Youth alternate facilitating meetings.
- Board: Youth are elected to roles and the president facilitates meetings.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS:

- Provide food/snacks
- Integrate icebreakers and team-building activities
- Bring in guest speakers
- Allow social time
- Provide useful training on advocacy skills
- Supply educational materials
- Encourage anonymous feedback
- Use structured brainstorming to encourage and solicit ideas from all participants
- Give responsibilities to the youth
- Celebrate successes!

**CREATE A PLAN OF ACTION:** Structure is needed to outline the who, what, when, where, and how of the activities that will be implemented. Always keep the long term goals in mind. Action plans are also motivational tools. Revisit your action plan and amend it, as necessary. An agency plan incorporates the youth action plan into the scope of work. Youth action plans can be created together with the youth. Adapt the plan in response to issues in the community. Your action plans must be relevant to the community and to the population. Give a copy of the action plan to everyone in the group. Follow the plan to keep the group on track.

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## HOW TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH YOUTH

Working with youth requires an understanding of how youth communicate. Discuss and agree to the methods that work for your group. These may be in-person, text messaging, phone calls, email, group Skype, teleconferences, or webinars, mail, social networks (which support an online presence for your group.) A phone or text tree gives the youth responsibility in communicating with each other. Communication through school can include working with school advisors, putting reminders in the school announcements or newspapers, or posting flyers.

## HOW TO OVERCOME SOME LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

**TRANSPORTATION:** Whenever youth are transported by someone other than a parent or guardian, permission slips are a necessity. Some agencies carry liability that allows staff to transport youth. Here are some alternate suggestions:

- Go to the youth by having meetings at schools, and other safe areas that are more convenient for the youth.
- Recruit volunteer drivers from other agencies who are able to transport youth.
- Consider using public transportation or walking.
- Establish multiple smaller groups by geography.
- Meet as a larger group less frequently.
- Hold some meetings remotely via Skype, teleconference, and webinars.

**RURAL AREAS:** Groups in rural areas are more spread out and may deal with scattered internet and cell phone coverage. Being aware of those limitations in advance will help choose the options that will still allow your group to be successful.

**SAFETY:** Have permission slips for any activities that occur outside your usual meeting place. Stay in groups and leave and report any potentially dangerous situation. Have medical information and emergency contacts on file for youth before you need it.

**YOUTH SCHEDULES:** Be considerate of youth school schedule and other extracurricular commitments. This may mean meeting in the evening or on the weekend.



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