



Engaging Youth in

Heart & Soul Community Planning

Spring, 2011





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Introduction

The challenges and rewards involved in engaging young people are rich and interesting enough that merely making the effort can add a layer of vitality and depth to your efforts. Some of these rewards are similar to those you will gain from engaging any group of community members: you can expand a project team's talent pool; diversify and broaden participation; and identify new issues and new solutions. Other rewards are unique to young people, who have an uncanny ability to change the conversation by introducing new perspectives, reframing priorities, and taking the long view on an issue.

This section explores the importance of engaging young people, provides an overview of youth engagement ideas, and describes various ways to define the youth demographic.

Why is Engaging Young People Important?

Engaging young people can be rewarding on many levels. Young people who participate in community activities enjoy the opportunity to benefit personally by being socially productive: they develop a democratic or civic mindset and build leadership skills; they gain experience and confidence; they are directed towards relationship building; they gain respect and recognition from peers and adults; they are empowered to improve themselves and the communities they live in; and they enhance their resumes for future jobs or college applications. These outcomes have lasting value for individual youths, but unless your community leaders are benevolent youth advocates, why would a town, committee, department, or planner spend precious time and resources on unmandated efforts with uncertain outcomes such as youth engagement? Here are six reasons:

1. Youth are community members with needs deserving to be addressed.

Young people typically comprise 15 to 25 percent of any community's population, and as a group use the community's assets at a disproportionately higher rate. Young people support local businesses and are more likely than adults to stay within their community throughout the entire day, more likely to rely on public transport or non-car transportation options, and more likely to use park spaces. In many cases, effectively addressing the needs of youth also addresses the needs of other stakeholder groups such as seniors or young families.





2. Youth have unique insights into the experiences, needs, communication habits, and interests of young people.

Many communities spend a large proportion of their resources on facilities and programs for young people, including some 40 to 60 percent or more of the town budget on schools. Young people are highly experienced consumers of these services, and can provide potentially cost-saving feedback on them. They are also highly experienced at inhabiting their community in general, and can provide valuable insights into land use decisions, development decisions, and community strengths and weaknesses.

3. Youth are a talent pool of leaders, communicators, networkers, facilitators, idea generators, analysts, and coordinators.

Just like adults, young people's talents, interests, and capacities span a wide spectrum. Assumptions that all young people are unreliable, apathetic, incapable of grasping complexities, or overly self-interested are simply wrong. There are numerous examples of extremely capable young individuals and groups of young people who have mobilized their peers, provided critical insight into difficult decisions, and made invaluable contributions to improving their communities.

4. Youthful idealism can introduce great ideas that might be otherwise overlooked.

Adults are generally more accepting of youthful idealism. Adult dreamers and idealists are often dismissed as unrealistic or impractical and inexplicably labeled with such high-altitude terms as blue-sky, pie-in-the-sky, head-in-the-clouds, or (for the really far out)... space-shot. Young people and their big ideas, on the other hand, can be legitimized by the fact that they will still be around in 40, 50, or 60 years and will inherit the results of current decisions.

5. Young people can change the conversation.

Raise your hand if your community's public hearings are filled with the same individuals who persevere about the same issues using the same arguments again and again, regardless of the topic of the day, until no one else wants to even bother showing up. When given a platform, and the expectation that they will be heard, young people are often seen as neutral parties and have an uncanny ability to redirect the conversation. As noted above, young people can introduce a long-term perspective. They can highlight unforeseen challenges or craft fantastic solutions. They can take a fresh look at old problems, reframing them with a perspective that is less loaded with the baggage of past grievances or entrenched interests. Finally, by trying to communicate with and engage young people, adults are forced to be more thoughtful and creative in their messages and approach.



6. Youth-friendly communities are enduring communities.

Youth friendly communities generate benefits for everyone. More young people are likely to remain or return to a place where they had a positive experience growing up. New families will be attracted to live where their children have access to healthy environments and diverse resources. Businesses that seek lifestyle benefits for their employees will be drawn to the same places that families and young adults are drawn to.

What is Youth Engagement?

Youth engagement can be almost any activity or effort to include young people in civic projects, local government, or community analysis and decision-making. The various models that describe youth engagement typically begin with simple and short-term interactions that are task-specific. The pinnacle of these models include more enduring and meaningful opportunities for participation in local government, such as embedding youth in government structures and processes, enabling youth leadership, and establishing official mechanisms for youth advocacy.

Roger Hart's model¹ (Figure 1) describes eight levels of engagement. It begins somewhat below actual participation with youth manipulation and tokenism, superseded by moderate participation with youth as contributors and informants, and capped by more meaningful participation with youth as collaborators and decision-makers.

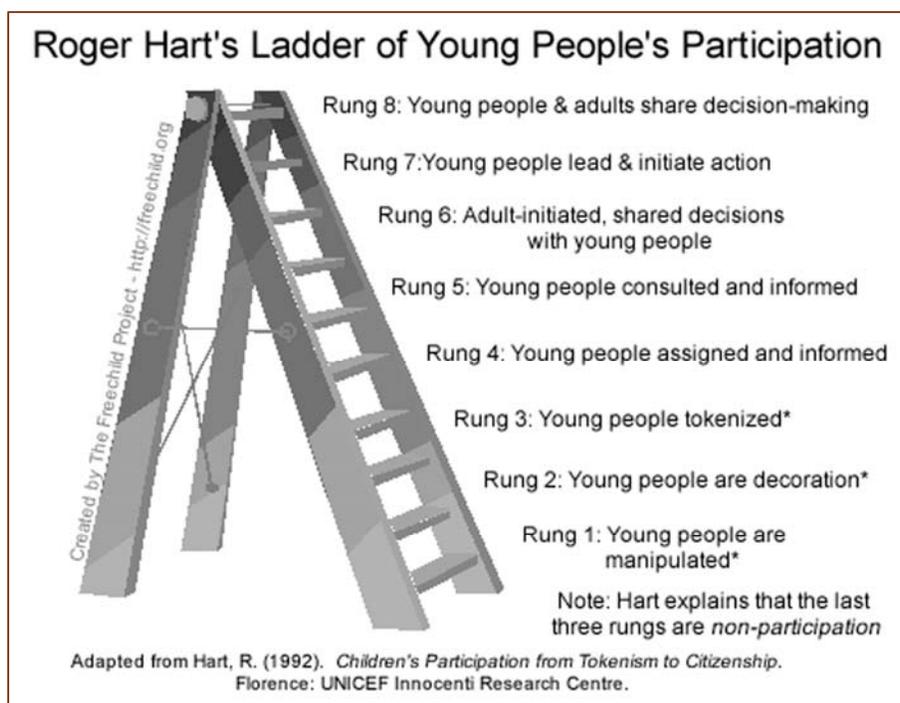


Figure 1: Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

¹ The FreeChild Project. (2008). Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation. Retrieved Jan 27, 2011 from <http://freechild.org/ladder.htm>



Examples of youth engagement along these hierarchies could include:

[non participation]	[simple participation....]advanced participation]
<i>Manipulation and Tokenism</i>	<i>Contributors and Informants</i>	<i>Collaborators and Decision Makers</i>
Young people’s contributions to a project are co-opted by adults and used to advance an adult’s agenda.	Young people are asked to respond to a survey or participate in a workshop.	Young people are on project committees, contribute to project planning and communications, and help define the scope and the issues.
Young people’s contributions are solicited to satisfy some mandate or ideal but do not have a direct relationship to any real analysis or decision-making.	Young people are asked to participate in a youth-specific event or project and engage in community problem-solving with other youth.	Young people serve on existing town boards and committees and/or on a Youth Council.
Young people’s participation is not meaningful, but is used to promote the project (e.g. a photo opportunity).	Young people are assigned specific tasks that will develop input or analysis for a project.	Young people create and define community planning projects or design youth-specific aspects of the project.

Who Are Youth?

When embarking on any public engagement effort, it’s important to identify your target audiences. Who qualifies as a ‘youth’ in your town? The answer to this may be driven by the goals of the program or the ideals of your community, or it may be led by your access to youth through networks or project partners.

A quick survey of municipal youth engagement programs reveals that, despite your best efforts to remain youthful, your chance to qualify as an official young person drops dramatically throughout your twenties. You may continue to be a ‘young adult’ for some time, but ‘youth’ are typically between the ages of 15 to 25 (*United Nations*), 15 to 17 (*Burlington Vermont’s Youth on Boards program*), a high-school junior or senior (*Boston Mayor’s Youth Council*), or under 18 (*Centralia Washington’s Municipal Code*). In Seattle, you get to be a ‘young adult’ if you are between 18 to 29 years old (*Seattle’s Get Engaged Program*).

It is vital to clarify the target age group early, since engagement programs and communication strategies will vary significantly depending on the project team’s networks, the age group itself, or the program goals.





Guidelines

Youth engagement tends to fall along a continuum of opportunities ranging from straightforward contributors to more invested collaborators. The level of engagement for individuals will span the spectrum within any given project, as some young people may choose to participate as contributors, and others may choose to get more involved. The important thing is to provide the opportunity and make it stick.

This section describes key guidelines for creating a youth-friendly environment, preparing for youth engagement, and implementing a youth engagement strategy.

Create a Youth-Friendly Civic Environment

Create the expectation that youth must be engaged in a meaningful way. Many examples of successful youth engagement programs begin with a clear and consistent message, from one or more community leaders, that engaging youth is essential. When a project leader or community official consistently asks, “Were young people involved?” the message is reinforced. A youth engagement mandate can be informal or adopted as an official policy, but essentially it is an institutionalized expectation that civic projects and programs will engage youth in strategic planning and evaluation.

Publicly recognize youth participation. Awards programs or annual recognition ceremonies for youth participants reinforce the message that youth involvement in civic life is valued. Make sure that the youth program or young individuals are named in the newspaper articles, inscribed on the plaque at the park, or let youths hold the scissors at the ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

Broadcast the message that youth are valued.

Community leaders have consistent opportunities to send a message. By recognizing young people at events, appreciating their efforts and inputs, giving them a platform to speak and be heard, and publicly speaking up for youth, community leaders can send the message to everyone that young people are valuable members of the community.

YOUTH-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES have...

- A Youth Task Force or youth on boards
- ‘Commitment to Youth’ policies
- Adult allies or advocates for youth
- Opportunities for young people to speak and be heard
- Opportunities for young people to engage and take action on community issues





Develop youth advocates / adult allies. Allies are adults able to work with young people and facilitate their relationship with other adults in the decision-making arena. Many adults would typically, often unintentionally, overlook or undervalue youth input. In meetings, which can be an intimidating environment to begin with, adults reflexively talk over each other and don't encourage youth to speak up. An adult ally, on the other hand, would know to speak up for or recognize youths at formal meetings, identify the need for youth representation on committees or at specific events, or partner with young people to support their efforts at civic engagement.

Prepare for Youth Engagement

Identify existing youth resources, leaders, and networks. Most communities already have youth networks and programs that can provide access points to engaging young people. Faith groups, recreation clubs, schools and school clubs, teen centers, and the local coffee shop can all be hubs of youth activity. Set aside time in a project team meeting to identify these resources and a strategy to connect with them.

Recruit young people to the project advisory committee. Young people serving on the project advisory committee can provide valuable insight into outreach strategies and help design youth-friendly engagement activities. Ask adults who work with youth to nominate a few potential representatives. Young committee members must be given equal respect and equal access to project information, and adult allies on the committee must work to ensure this. Invite at least two youth representatives to provide peer support and expand youth representation. Any fewer verges on tokenism, and experience shows that having only one youth rep. results in less successful outcomes. Train adult committee members to be youth-friendly by being respectful, making space for youth to speak, and avoiding patronizing remarks such as "you're pretty smart for a kid."

YOUTH COLLABORATORS need....

- To be involved as early as possible in the project.
- Peer support - at least two youth reps.
- Adult support and respect.
- To be on the agenda.

Create a youth working group, task force, or advisory team. A team composed of young people and adult mentors or allies can be convened to specifically focus on youth concerns, outreach and engagement.

Make sure that youth have adult allies and/or adult mentors. This may occur naturally as committee members build relationships and trust, but if it doesn't then it will be important to identify and assign this role to an appropriate adult. Adult allies and mentors are responsible for sticking up for young people and ensuring that they have the resources they need to participate in project planning and decision making. Allies and mentors are not meant to handhold so much that young people fail to find their own voices and strengths.





The time to get youth involved is now. Youth representatives ought to start on the same page as everyone else, so that they can continue to be on the same page throughout the project. Nothing can be more intimidating or unempowering than joining a group midstream and finding out that many of the important decisions and relationships have already been made.

Put “Youth Updates” on the regular agenda. This time slot can be overlooked, so it’s important to ensure that youth reps have an opportunity to provide updates on their work and bring questions to the table. Avoid putting “Youth Updates” as the last item on the agenda. Doing so sends a strong message about who counts and doesn’t.

Attract & Sustain Youth Participation

Adults and youth are similarly motivated or discouraged. The following key guidelines will encourage people of all ages to participate.

Make participation meaningful. This is a challenge and a requirement for any engagement effort, but young people in particular are acutely sensitive to being misunderstood or having their input dismissed. Input from young people needs to have clear connections to the evaluation and decision-making process, and those connections should be explained before, during, and after the process.

Ensure that young people are heard. Youth voices are easier to hear when you make a special effort to include them, and nothing says “don’t come back” like being ignored or left out of a conversation. But guard against condescending; adults who change the tone of their voices or dumb down the message when addressing youth are a serious turn-off. Make sure that event or meeting facilitators are youth-friendly and prepared to recognize youth participants. Give youth a visible role in the meeting by asking young people to present or sit on a panel. At an open house or workshop event, include youth specific topics as break-out questions or create specific youth-only activities.

YOUTH WILL PARTICIPATE IF...

- You don’t talk down to them, but treat them as equals.
- They know when and where to show up.
- They are encouraged to speak up and know they will be heard.
- The location and timing don’t conflict with other responsibilities.
- They feel that their participation is meaningful and they have a role.
- They feel connected to the project or cause.
- Their participation translates to concrete results.





Ensure that young people know that they were heard. People are easily discouraged when they feel that their efforts or ideas are not valued. This doesn't mean that everyone's ideas need to become the next priority action in the town plan, but it does mean that people like to know that they were considered. All too often, input *was* considered and *is* in the follow up, but it has been reframed or digested into an unrecognizable format. Follow up reports, presentations, or activities should always include a review of recent input and how that input informed the next steps. If the input will not be carried forward, include a response that explains why. Use young people's own words whenever an opportunity presents itself.

Use youth-oriented communication strategies. Remember to always post a 'Warning' somewhere in the back pages of a local paper. Just kidding! As email becomes old-school, new forms of sending the message are constantly evolving like Facebook and Twitter. Good strategies—like any community organizing or marketing strategy—are ones that tap into existing youth networks, focus on youth hangouts, and make participation seem worthwhile. See our Quick Guide to Outreach and Communications (http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/outreach_communications) for more detail.

Actively facilitate youth access to events. Young people, just like everyone else, are more likely to attend an event if it fits into their daily routine and if they have some way of getting there. Public events can be coordinated with school schedules, held at schools or youth hangouts, or held in locations with public transit access.

Events not meetings. Who gets excited about attending a public meeting? Everyone, including young people, will be more motivated if the so-called meeting is really an event—bring in a local band, serve dinner, give away prizes, hold a raffle, set it up like a café or a speakeasy or a casino, play a movie, use your imagination.

Youth Engagement Partnerships

Here are some tips for when you are considering potential partners for your youth engagement efforts.

School programs. Some of the best examples of youth project partnerships are found in local schools. Community planning projects offer limitless options for curriculum development - art, media, writing, research, social studies, science, geography, and many other topics. School programs can be offered as an extracurricular activity, but a more viable option is a program offered as a class or a service learning project. Student participants effectively form a 'youth task force'. They have regular meetings, conduct research, and have required outputs. This ideal situation requires a willing and capable teacher who serves as a coordinator and mentor. Other approaches to partnering with a school include: independent study or service learning programs for individual youths; youth representatives selected from the student council or service clubs; or special youth-focused events held at the school.





Youth-focused agencies and programs. Many communities have local clubs or non-profits that serve specific youth needs, such as a YMCA, a 4-H club, Scouts, a counseling service, or a teen center. These organizations provide the advantage of having contacts and communication channels in place for reaching young people. Staffers in these organizations also have experience with coordinating youth activities, identifying young people with particular interests or capabilities, and connecting with 'hard-to-reach' youth. These over-worked, under-paid staff members will require some convincing that their participation will be worthwhile, so take time to consider how the project will help them rather than how they can help the project.

Faith organizations. Churches and other faith organizations are the original community organizers and continue to be social network hubs. Many faith groups have committees on community service, and they often have an active youth group with youth and adult coordinators. Partnering with a faith organization may be more appropriate in some communities, especially where the organization is seen as an agenda-free community center and has a community service orientation. Organizations that are highly focused on being 'separate', proselytizing, or evangelizing may be less appropriate as partners and may be less interested as well. Project partner or not, faith organizations can be a beachhead for finding new youth niches in the community.

Colleges and universities. College faculty and students can bring many valuable resources to a project, including time and talent that may not be available elsewhere. Since college students are not always representative of full-time local youth, it's important to understand the goals of the youth engagement program and clarify the difference between using college students as a resource and actual youth engagement. The critical question is whether or not college students represent local youth interests.

Dedicated individuals. Sometimes the only available project partner is a dedicated member of the community. This person may have a good track record of working with youth, or be someone who works with youth and can't secure organizational support for a full partnership. This person may be.... wait for it.... an actual young person. It is important that this individual be included on the project team, and is expressly tasked with advocating for youth and coordinating the youth engagement program.

IDEAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS...

- Have established networks and communication channels.
- Have programs that can tie in with project activities.
- Can identify young people who are ready to support the project.





Include Youth in Community-Wide Engagement Activities

If your team has decided to have engagement activities that are open to the general public, and hope to include youth in those activities, remember to:

Ensure that facilitators are youth-friendly. Event facilitators must be prepared to recognize youth participants and ensure that their voices are heard. A strong, experienced facilitator will have these skills, but project managers should ensure that less experienced facilitators are on the lookout for moments when young people are overlooked, talked over, or disregarded.

Create youth zones. Young people can find it difficult to participate in an adult-dominated conversation. If the event is designed to include break-out groups, consider designating one table for young people only. Make sure that the facilitator for that table is trained or otherwise prepared to work with young people. If the event is more of an open house, set up an activity area (*call it a youth corner or youth lounge*) for youth only.

Put youth issues on everyone's table. If you are confident that your facilitators are youth-friendly, encourage youth and adults to engage in youth-related concerns together. This could mean that one break-out group focuses on youth issues. It could also mean that each of the break out groups are instructed to consider youth in relation to their topic: How are young people affected by this topic? What are youth concerns about this topic? What do the young people at your table have to say about it?

Train youth to be facilitators. Certain young people may find it easier to speak when they have a role to play at the meeting. One way to bring youth into the conversation is to ask them to facilitate or take notes on flipcharts. This requires some pre-event work to identify and train the youth facilitators.

Ask youth to present. This requires that youth specific activity precede the event. If young people have conducted some research or activity during previous phases of the project, this is the perfect way to recognize that work and show respect to those involved.

Advertise to youth. As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter and in the Quick Guide to Outreach and Communications (http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/outreach_communications), remember to advertise the event through appropriate channels.

YOUTH WHO ATTEND A COMMUNITY EVENT need....

- Youth-friendly facilitators.
- Relevant issues in which to engage.
- Opportunities to speak and be heard.
- To know that the event is happening.





Design Youth-Specific Engagement Activities

If you are conducting youth-only engagement activities as a separate stream from broad public engagement:

Collaborate with youth organizational partners. Youth organizations have experience in reaching out to youth and collaborating with them. Ask a youth-focused partner to take the lead on coordinating this effort.

Let young people take the lead. Ideally, young people ought to be involved in every aspect of planning and implementing a youth engagement program. A young person on the project team or a youth task force needs to have the opportunity to collaborate or lead in the strategy development and event planning. At the very least, be sure to let young people identify youth issues and work on potential solutions.

Ensure that the youth engagement outputs feed into the decision-making process. Assimilating feedback into the decision-making process and reflecting the feedback in reports and communications materials are at the heart of good planning and often are the most challenging to accomplish. Doing this is the most important factor in making youth participation meaningful.

Give youth access to decision-makers. Youth who participate want to know that they are being heard. When select board members, councilors, mayors, principals, and other community leaders are present at youth events and meetings, they are showing respect and demonstrating to youth that their messages will not be filtered or reinterpreted before reaching the ears of key decision-makers.

Offer training or learning opportunities. Just like most adults, young people like to feel prepared and knowledgeable before engaging an issue. Opportunities to learn can include facilitation training, 'planning 101' orientations, independent research on community planning issues, or targeted investigations such as interviewing community members.

Develop mentoring opportunities. Ideal adult or young adult mentors are experienced in the subject matter and are able to build a trusting relationship with young people. Mentors advocate for youth, help them understand the subject matter, and facilitate their relationships with other adults.

Strike a balance between youth-focused concerns and general community challenges. Young people will find that youth issues are the most compelling to identify and engage, but they will feel

YOUTH-SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS SHOULD....

- Be integral to the project process (not a sideshow).
- Provide learning and training opportunities.
- Make clear connections between inputs and outputs.
- Be designed by youth or in collaboration with youth.
- Engage both youth-focused and community-wide issues.





under-valued if left out of the ‘big picture’ discussions. Find ways for both to be on the youth engagement agenda, and draw out the connections between them.

Peel off a concrete task, but don’t make youth engagement a side-show. It can be easier to attract youth and manage youth engagement activities when the activity is a distinct and action-oriented task. However, if the task is a standalone event or project, make sure it is still integral to the project. Don’t let it be a ‘make work’ project so that the project team can ‘get on with the real work’. Whoever is coordinating the youth engagement work must be an integral part of the team who understands how the engagement will feed into the overall project objectives.

Engagement Tools & Events

Here are some youth-friendly ideas for community engagement.

Online Forums. Online forums include social media websites such as a project Facebook page, a Twitter stream, or a blog. These forums can be used to distribute information about the project and stimulate discussion and interest in topics. Forums can sometimes be used to generate ideas and identify issues.

Digital and Mobile Participation Tools (beyond the online forum). Numerous technologies and tools for reaching young people are out there. Foundational technologies include online social media, internet crowd-sourcing, and mobile phone devices and applications. The effective application of these tools requires expertise that you might find among the youth of your community, or in a consultant. Applications include, for example: text messaging to provide event reminders; online brainstorming and prioritization tools; online community mapping; text message voting; and audience response systems that receive text messages.

Multi-media Art as a Participation Tool. Art-based activities can be a highly engaging way for young people to explore or express ideas, learn about their community, or conduct an investigation. Examples range from low to high-tech, including: photo-collages, model building and sculpture, drawing or painting, video production, photo-journalism, poetry, storytelling, and essay writing.

Ideas for Multimedia Art...

- **Dreaming or Visioning Activities.** Young people can dream up their ideal future and represent it as future newspaper headline, a collage of images, a drawing, a poem, or a story. Dreaming activities can help identify current issues (because in the future they have been solved), they can help identify values (because some ideal has been realized), and they can help identify gaps and opportunities (because in the future they have been optimized).

Youth Research Teams. A youth research team is typically organized in the context of a youth task force or a school classroom (examples range as young as 4th to 5th grade classes). Teams can be tasked with: selecting a research topic; investigating the topic through readings, interviews, and field investigations; reporting on their findings; and sometimes, presenting their findings to the community at a forum or open house. Topics can range widely - including, for example: the time it





takes a dollar bill to leave town, the life story of the oldest person in town, the amount of land it would take to feed everyone in town, the carbon footprint of the town. Local landscapes, architecture, farming, history, or community values and opinions are all fair game.

Ideas for Youth Research Teams...

- **Community Scorecards.** Young people can design an assessment tool around a theme such as ‘sustainability’, ‘bike and pedestrian friendliness’ or ‘youth-friendliness’ and score the community or different neighborhoods.
- **Community Interviews / Polling.** Research teams can design an interview or a survey to capture feedback from the broader community (or their parents, grandparents or classmates). Interviews can follow a storytelling or journalism format, and can be captured using video or other media.
- **Community Mapping.** Mapping is an excellent format for recording local information, whether it is collected firsthand by the researcher or through interviews. Mapping is described in more detail below.
- **Taking Action / follow-through.** Youth researchers can become impassioned about their findings, and it can be inspiring to encourage them to go beyond research by taking action. This typically requires that the team select a single issue to approach and devise a strategy for engaging solutions. Follow-through could also be through outreach, where the research team facilitates a youth engagement activity with their peers (see below).

Youth Summit / Youth Forum. Young people can be invited to a specific youth event on community planning. The event typically includes presentations and trainings, but most activities involve brainstorming in break-out groups and using techniques such as ‘world cafés’ or open houses with several activity stations. The goal is usually to identify and prioritize youth issues, and to prepare strategies or action ideas. Prior to the event, a team of young people can also be trained as facilitators.

Ideas for Youth Summits...

- **Classroom discussions.** Some schools may allow for teachers to structure a series of classroom discussions around a community issue rather than holding a separate forum.
- **Youth representatives.** If youth representatives for the project team or a task force have not yet been identified, this is a good event to introduce the project to youth and seek out youth representatives for the committee.

Community Mapping. Community mapping allows young people to examine the physical aspects of their community. In a workshop/classroom setting or through individual surveys, youth are prompted through questions to identify and locate certain areas or places on a map: most important places, dangerous places, safe places, hang outs, routes to school, etc.

Ideas for Community Mapping...

- **Youth investigators.** A team of young people can be trained to interview other community members, using community mapping as the both the prompt and the recording device.





These activities are best conducted in pairs, so that young people can support each other and take turns talking or recording.

- **Photo tour.** A simple prompt is to tell participants to map the locations where they would take a photo, and limit them to 5 or 10 photos. The reason for the photo can have a theme such as 'landmarks', 'best places', 'worst places', 'places that represent the character of your community', 'great views', etc. The same exercise can be conducted literally by actually taking the photos, or figuratively by simply marking the presumed locations on a map.
- **Quests.** Quests are a fun way to get people thinking about their community's geography. Quests are similar to scavenger hunts with a focus on highlighting the special places and stories of a community.





Resources

Case Studies

BROAD CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS (NOT PROJECT-SPECIFIC)

Youth on Boards

Manchester, VT

Dates: 2007 to present

Website: <http://www.orton.org/projects/manchester>

Manchester's Select Board appointed youth to Town boards and commissions in 2007, and now high school students spend their weeknights discussing the nuances of zoning setbacks and design standards alongside their adult counterparts. Students are appointed to the Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Development Review Board, Parks & Recreation Committee, Conservation Commission, Energy Committee and the Mark Skinner Library Board. They serve as full voting members on all but two of the boards, which, for legal reasons, do not allow minors to vote. Students attend meetings, read up on the issues, comment on proposals and make their voices heard.

Comprehensive Youth Engagement Strategy

Hampton, VA

Dates: 1990 to present

Website: http://www.hampton.gov/foryouth/youth_milestones.html

Hampton Virginia has been recognized as a pioneer in the area of youth civic engagement. This effort began as a Council appointed 'Coalition for Youth', who proceeded to develop a strategic plan around engaging youth and responding to youth issues. Initially funded by a grant, this coalition has since become a permanent city department. In the time since its inception, City Council has adopted a 'Commitment to Youth' policy, the planning department has created staff positions for youth, a Youth Commission has been established, Youth Advisory boards have formed for the school system, youth have been appointed to various city boards and commissions, and a Youth Component has been adopted as a part of the city's community plan.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Official Community Plan review

Victoria, BC (Canada)

Dates: October 2009 to present

Website: <http://www.shapeyourfuturevictoria.ca/get-involved/events-and-activities/youth-engagement/>

The City of Victoria is currently updating its Official Community Plan. The city has an active Youth Council that was consulted early in the process by participating in a goal and strategy development workshop. At a school-wide assembly, the Mayor and city staff presented the project to over 300





high school students. Kiosks were set up at the high school for students to complete a survey on priorities, and city staff facilitated in-class priority setting workshops with twelfth grade classes. Some of these twelfth graders were trained to facilitate a follow up ‘Community Café’ event for youth to discuss issues and ideas about their city. At a community-wide forum, a special ‘Youth Planning Station’ was set up for youth activities.

Downtown Master Plan

Biddeford, Maine

Dates: 2008 - 2010

Website: <http://www.orton.org/projects/biddeford>

High school youth were involved in conducting community research and developing priorities for the City’s Downtown Master Plan. A local high school English teacher and a project intern, who asked students to interview their friends and family about downtown Biddeford and identify common themes, coordinated this work. The stories, themes, and research were used to prepare for a series of neighborhood meetings. With trained student-facilitators, the class participated in their own “neighborhood meetings” at the high school and at different youth organizations in the city. Input from all of these meetings informed a community-wide forum, which established that youth engagement in the downtown was a priority issue to be addressed in the final plan. As a follow up, two additional youth meetings were held to refine a list of strategies to engage youth, which will be included in the recommendations for the Master Plan.

Community Visioning (prep for Comprehensive Plan)

Damariscotta, Maine

Dates: 2008 - 2010

Website: <http://www.orton.org/projects/damariscotta?page=5>

This project included two efforts at engaging youth. The first was conducted by a youth intern as a summer project, who developed a digital slideshow of ‘what people love’ about Damariscotta and held a small youth art event. For the second effort, the project coordinator engaged a small group of high school youth to design and disseminate a survey to other high school students about what improvements they’d like to see in town. The results of the survey were presented to the project committee, and one youth was hired to work on implementing the recommendations.

Community Visioning

Killingly, CT

Dates: 2007 - 2010

Website: <http://www.orton.org/projects/borderlands?page=5>

Town staff worked with local intermediate school teachers to develop a multidisciplinary watershed curriculum, which focused on the Town of Killingly and its water bodies as the classroom. Students conducted water tests, visited with mill owners, created a mural facing the Five Mile River, developed histories of the area and provided input on a key redevelopment area using keypad polling

Arts and Civic Engagement

Starksboro, VT

Dates: 2008-2009





Website: <http://www.orton.org/projects/starksboro?page=5>

One of the goals of this project was to “Engage youth in multi-generational community conversations and decisions.” The project began with college students interviewing over 50 community members (including youth) and capturing their stories. A group of Starksboro high school students then interviewed community members and created portraits that reflected what they heard. Students at every grade level used the stories as part of a school-wide curriculum theme on local heroes. Starksboro is using the project results that identified community values and themes to prioritize community development projects such as construction of a trail system and pedestrian improvements, and reuse of public buildings for community gathering places. Art making continues to have a place in civic life.

IN-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

School-based Engagement Program

Burlington, VT

Dates: 2003 - present

Website: <http://www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/healthy/training>

The Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Kids Project was initiated by two non-profits: Smart Growth Vermont and Shelburne Farms. It is designed to engage students in community planning activities by having them draw connections between the design of their communities and impacts on their health. Trained teachers and volunteers direct students in activities involving community-based research, assessment, and service learning projects. By both advocating for and volunteering with specific projects that improve the health of their neighborhood, students gain the skills to be engaged citizens now and in the future, model this behavior for their parents and other adults and learn they can make a difference. The curriculum has been applied in 4th and 5th grade classrooms in Burlington as well as classrooms in Puerto Rico.

Resources for Further Information

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ‘BIG PICTURE’

Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth (2002)

Book: book preview available at <http://books.google.com>

With an international focus that is readily applied to US communities, this is a practical manual on how to promote the participation of young people in urban planning, design and implementation. Published by Earthscan.

“Everyone Wins” Video

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHMaj8dgT4Y>





This video was created by the **Heartwood Institute** for the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services - Child and Youth Strategy. The video provides an overview of youth engagement benefits and concepts.

Authentic Youth Civic Engagement, A Guide for Municipal Leaders

PDF:

http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/8DCFB802143A42279291EDD2F02E4E18/IYEF_AYCE_Guide_7-10.pdf

This overview document from the National League of Cities (2010) is a foundational resource on youth engagement in the local government arena. It introduces concepts and frameworks for youth engagement, strategies, and case studies.

Handbook, A How-To Guide for Adults on Involving Youth in Community Planning

PDF: http://www.californiacenter.org/docs/Youth_Voices_in_Community_Design_2004.pdf

This guide by the California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development is an excellent overall resource on youth engagement. It outlines concepts and rationales for youth engagement, provides examples and case studies, and includes project planning tools.

YOUTH COUNCILS AND YOUTH ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Youth Participation in Local Government website

Website: <http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/civ/youthgov.aspx>

This website from the **Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington** includes links to municipal code examples and resources on youth participation on boards and commissions.

Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making

PDF: <http://forumfyi.org/node/127>

This guide from **the forum for Youth Investment** reviews the theory and practice of creating and maintaining a youth council. The guide includes case studies from youth councils across North America.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SITE PLANNING AND DESIGN

Trust for Public Land's Parks for People Initiative: New York City Playgrounds

Website: <http://www.tpl.org/>

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQFsIRLa1u4>

This program uses participatory design with youth to design and redevelop playground spaces and parks in New York City.

ONLINE RESOURCE COLLECTIONS





Planning Tool Exchange

Website: <http://www.planitx.org/>

This online resource from the **Orton Family Foundation** is a collection of planning tools and information relevant to Heart & Soul planning. A 'Youth' keyword search finds case studies and resources on youth engagement.

ResourcesZine

Website: <http://www.planning.org/resourceszine/>

This online resource from the **American Planning Association** is a collection of planning tools and information specific to youth outreach and engagement. It includes lesson plans, events, publications, and further resources.

Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development

Website: <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/catalog/toolkits/resources>

This non-profit works on youth development and youth engagement issues in communities and organizations across North America. This website lists several publications on various youth engagement topics, some of which include civic engagement. Publications are for purchase only.

Knowledge Center on 'Civic Engagement'

Website: <http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/publications-and-resources.aspx?q=Civic+Engagement>

The **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** has a strong youth and community focus. The 'knowledge center' on their website includes dozens of free publications on youth engagement.

Promise of Place website

Website: <http://www.promiseofplace.org/>

This website is a resource for Place Based Education programs. Resources include case studies, project examples, and publications.

Youth Civic Engagement Initiative website

Website: <http://www.cfleads.org/ccfy/civic/index.htm>

This is a program of the **Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth**. Their website includes an overview of youth engagement concepts, case studies, and publications on youth engagement.

ACTIVITY RESOURCES AND TOOLKITS

Asset Mapping, A Handbook

PDF: http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/cms/documents/11/Asset_Mapping1.pdf

This handbook is a very well organized, step by step instruction manual for community mapping workshops. It does not target young people specifically, but the activities can easily be used for both adults and young people. The handbook outlines three practical approaches to asset mapping: a comprehensive analysis approach, a storytelling approach, and an approach focused on physical assets.





MAPPED! A youth community mapping toolkit for Vancouver

PDF:

<http://www.vancouveryouth.ca/sites/covytheme.tidallevel.com/files/Mapped%20Vancouver%20Final.pdf>

This toolkit provides step-by-step outlines for three map-based workshops for youth engagement, including a photo-visioning workshop. The document also includes case studies, lessons learned, and additional web resources.

Making Community Connections: The Orton Family Foundation Community Mapping Program (2003)

Book: book preview available at <http://books.google.com>

Focusing on geographic information systems (GIS) and the global positioning system (GPS), this book is designed to bring teams of teachers and students together with community members to study resources of interest and importance to the community, such as wildlife habitats, rivers, or ski resorts. The guide shows students how to gather and examine existing information, discover new facts through field investigation, map the resource using GIS/GPS tools, and interact with the community by using local experts who participate in the classroom and help with the field studies. Published by ESRI press.

Community Video Curriculum

Web: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2247>

Web: http://whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2008/04_vermont_youth/index.html

Lights, Camera...Leadership! Is a high school credit-bearing curriculum through which students develop leadership and academic skills by making and premiering a community video of some important issue in their community.





Youth Engagement Checklists

The following three checklists summarize key characteristics of (1) a strong youth engagement team, (2) a youth-friendly event, and (3) a meaningful youth engagement strategy. They can be used to assess your project's readiness for youth engagement and prepare for potential challenges.

1. Youth Engagement Readiness

- The project team includes organizations with youth engagement experience or a youth-serving mission.
- The project team includes young people (more than one).
- The project team includes designated adults who have been trained or have experience as youth allies.
- Young people on the team have equal access to project information and training.
- Young people on the team have incentives to remain committed (e.g. internship, stipend, school credit).
- There is a succession plan for young people on the team (e.g. overlapping appointments).
- The project team has a clear vision & purpose for engaging youth in the project.

2. Youth Event Preparation

- The event has youth-friendly facilitators.
- The event is accessible to young people (e.g. schedule, transportation, cost).
- The event has been advertised to young people.
- The event was designed by *or in collaboration with* young people.
- Our community-wide event includes youth topics and issues.
- Our community-wide event includes a youth-only space or break-out group.
- Our youth-only event(s) is integral to the planning and decision-making process.

3. Youth Engagement Strategy

- The project team understands the difference between *meaningful youth engagement* and *token youth engagement*.





- The project engagement plan includes youth engagement.
- The engagement strategy was developed by young people *or in collaboration with young people*.
- The project team knows about and has a plan for utilizing youth communication channels.
- Engagement plans have accounted for young people's schedules and access to transportation.
- Our strategy includes explaining how youth input will be incorporated into project results.
- Our strategy includes 'reporting back' on the results of youth input.
- Youth input has a direct and meaningful relationship to **community analysis and inventory phases** of the project.
- Youth input has a direct and meaningful relationship to **prioritization and decision making phases** of the project.
- Youth input has a direct and meaningful relationship to **action planning and implementation phases** of the project.
- Youth engagement has a direct and meaningful relationship to **monitoring and evaluation phases** of the project.
- Our strategy asks young people to identify their own issues and solutions.
- Our strategy asks young people to engage community-wide issues.
- Our strategy includes learning and mentoring opportunities for young people.





Project Planning Review

The following table outlines the steps in a typical planning project. The left column describes the general activities for each step, and the right column describes youth engagement activities that might occur during that step.

Project Steps	Youth Engagement Action(s)
I. Project Groundwork	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form working group • Outline project goals and parameters • Review and evaluate previous community efforts • Identify additional partners and resources • Create steering committee • Determine work plan and timeline • Identify audiences • Develop communications strategy and plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Identify and recruit youth partner agencies or individuals. ▢ Recruit young people to serve on the project advisory committee. ▢ Assemble a youth task force. ▢ Develop a youth engagement strategy that includes communication and participation plans. ▢ Set up online presence and online forums. ▢ Disseminate project information through youth communication channels.
II. Inventory & Analysis	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map community assets and networks • Collect and share community stories • Identify community values, issues, opportunities, challenges, ideas, and visions • Collect & analyze trends data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Start a Youth Research Team. ▢ Hold a Youth Summit or conduct similar youth engagement events that focus on identifying issues, assets, and values. ▢ Address youth issues at community meetings. ▢ Distribute findings/results of the Youth Research Team and other youth events. ▢ Target youth in survey design and distribution.
III. Decision Criteria	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize community values and issues • Develop evaluation criteria for decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Hold youth focus groups or convene the youth task force to prioritize and review criteria. ▢ Ensure that youth on the project advisory committee have an equal voice in providing feedback.





Project Steps	Youth Engagement Action(s)
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IV. Evaluating Alternatives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and analyze future alternatives • Consider and revise alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Hold youth focus groups or convene the youth task force to prioritize and review criteria. ▢ Ensure that youth on the project advisory committee have an equal voice in providing feedback. ▢ Target youth in survey design and distribution. ▢ Disseminate alternatives and project information through online media.
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V. Decision making & Action planning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize alternatives and priorities • Develop strategies and actions • Set priorities and time frames 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Hold a Youth Summit that focuses on action planning. ▢ Task the Youth Research Team or the Youth Task Force with developing an action plan to address youth issues. ▢ Embed youth issues and solutions in general strategic plans.
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VI. Implementation & Monitoring

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and/or update plans, policies and ordinances • Secure, allocate and invest resources • Secure commitments, assign and share responsibility • Measure and report progress • Support new leadership • Apply H&S values and process to new opportunities and challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▢ Celebrate / Recognize youth contributions to the project. ▢ Establish positions for youth representation on the monitoring committee. ▢ Advocate for the inclusion of youth representatives on other local government committees. ▢ Support/mentor youth who are engaged in implementation activities.
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