

Youth Engagement :

HOW and WHY?

What is youth engagement?



Youth are given the opportunity to take responsibility, take on challenges, and engage in concrete initiatives or processes that impact their lives, their peers, their community, and the services they receive.

This engagement can take place within existing services and programs, such as schools or youth centers, as well as through specific projects or new initiatives, or through more formal structures, such as committees or associations. **We notice, however, that youth tend to prefer being involved in unconventional initiatives and concrete actions with immediate results and for specific causes.**

Youth with certain challenges or vulnerabilities may face barriers to engagement. For example, dropping out of school, lacking social ties, being stigmatized, or having low self-esteem are all elements that may mean **some youth need a little extra encouragement to get involved.**

Therefore, for CBYF, involving youth from vulnerable backgrounds in our reflections, discussions, and implementation is a foundational and essential element of a successful and inclusive collective impact strategy. These youth are the experts on their own life situation and experiences, and they are in the best position to identify their needs and propose solutions to respond to them.



Together, let's put youth at the  of our reflections and our actions

By consulting them



By listening to them



By considering them



By involving them



WHY engage youth?

Because it has a positive effect on everyone! The youth themselves, the adults who accompany them, and the broader community can indeed benefit in many ways.

On the whole, involving youth in various settings and situations is conducive to creating links, intergenerationally and between different social groups. This mix not only allows for changes in mutual perceptions, but also helps to reduce certain inequalities in the social capital of youth.

Positive effects for youth

First, involving youth in taking on responsibilities and accomplishing different tasks allows them to develop their **sense of initiative**, their **autonomy**, and their **leadership**, which they can then apply to other areas of their lives.

« I can change what i don't like or what other students don't like [...]. » - student at CQPEL



Secondly, because this engagement fosters interaction with other youth and adults, it provides positive opportunities for **socialization**. Moreover, being part of a group helps develop a **sense of belonging**, which in turn encourages engagement.

Getting involved also allows youth to gain **experience** and develop various **skills** that will be useful in different areas of their lives. These new experiences also help them get to **know themselves better**, define their **identity** and, for some, **find their path** and the role they would like to play in their community.



« I also learn more about my abilities, my faults, My qualities... » - student at Leblanc high school

Finally, youth who get involved are more likely to be **successful** and feel **competent**, which leads to a sense of **pride** and **accomplishment**.

« It brings me the desire for achievement [...]. »
- student at CQPEL



Positive effects for the field

Involving youth also provides a learning opportunity for those who mentor and accompany them. Working with youth can inspire them to try **new ways of working** and to step out of their comfort zone. They can also **benefit** from the youth's knowledge and experience in certain areas, such as the use of digital platforms.

Youth engagement also makes it possible for communities to offer services and activities that are better adapted to their needs and tastes, which in turn facilitates the recruitment of new youth and helps to maintain motivation.

Finally, being a part of the process as youth get involved and learn from their experiences can be a great source of pride for the adults and community members around them.

HOW to engage youth?

The range of places, methods, and options for engagement is wide, and involvement can happen gradually in an organization.

To get off to a good start, first determine why your organization wants to involve youth and how you want to engage them. Then, it is important to be flexible and adapt your engagement opportunities to the youth's needs, desires, and interests.

Here are some ideas for reflection and action.



Inform them

One of the first steps will be to inform youth about what is happening in their community and the engagement opportunities that exist.

- Focus on communication channels used by youth, such as social media platforms
- Use an accessible vocabulary and, if you need to use more complex terms, take the time to explain their meaning



Consult them

Before launching various youth projects, asking for their input is the best way to ensure that they feel a part of what is happening in their community.

- Reach out to them where they are: at school, at youth centres or other community organizations, in parks, and on the street
- Use a variety of consultation methods: online surveys, focus groups, informal exchanges, outreach events
- Be sure to follow up on their input so they know their opinion is being heard



Involve them

Beyond consultation, participating in various bodies and committees within organizations is a very concrete way not only to hear directly from youth, but also to introduce them to democratic processes.

- Establish committees where the youth voice will be as important as the adult voice, if not more so: for organizing events, for planning activities, for managing budgets, etc.
- Include youth in more formal decision-making bodies, such as the Board of Directors or a committee responsible for hiring staff, for example



Enable them

Youth are more likely to get involved in initiatives when they feel strongly connected to the cause and when concrete results can be seen quickly.

- Set realistic, short-term goals with youth
- Work with them to define specific tasks that they can choose based on their interests and strengths
- Provide them with the support and tools necessary to accomplish their tasks: training, software, mentoring, etc.

Must-haves for successful youth engagement

No matter how you choose to involve youth in your organization, certain elements are key to maximizing the positive impacts of this engagement, both for the youth and for you and your organization.

- ✓ Be sure to reach out and engage with youth with a variety of backgrounds and profiles. Some of the more extroverted youth will find it easier to get involved, but the contributions of shy and introverted youth are just as important. Find a way to get them involved!
- ✓ Involve youth from the very beginning of any new project and adapt to their pace. This way, they will feel invested, and their contributions will be all the richer.
- ✓ To make it easier for youth to participate, consider modifying usual meeting formats: adjust the schedule to accommodate their other obligations, make sure the location is accessible by public transportation, offer lunch or snacks, have clear objectives, and don't prolong meetings for no reason.
- ✓ Provide regular feedback on their participation. Acknowledge their accomplishments and celebrate their efforts.
- ✓ Let go, accept that youth will do things in their own way, and most of all, trust them!

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