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Suggested Citation:

Ontario Public Health Association. (2011).

A Project Lead's Guide to Planning, Implementing, & Sustaining Youth Engagement Programming. OPHA: Toronto.

Published by:

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Production of this resource has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

The information in this pocketbook is adapted from the *Youth Engagement Toolkit: Working with Middle School Students to Enhance Protective Factors and Resiliency – A Resource for Health Professionals Working with Young People*.

All references are available in the Toolkit, which can be downloaded at www.opha.on.ca/programs/youth_engage.shtml



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Introduction

How can we help young people make decisions that support their health and well-being today and into the future and avoid behaviours that put them in harm's way?

This is a question asked by the many people who care about young people, including parents, teachers, researchers, youth workers, public health professionals, social workers, and young people themselves. Research-based and practice-based evidence in youth health promotion is increasingly pointing away from trying to prevent specific risk behaviours such as substance misuse and sexual risk-taking using education and awareness-based approaches, and moving solutions that strengthen young people's resilience and enhance protective factors in the environments in which they live, learn, and play. **Youth engagement** is increasingly seen as an important strategy for promoting young people's health and development.

This guide provides a roadmap to help public health professionals plan and administer youth engagement initiatives. It is part of a series of resources developed by the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) to support public health professionals in using youth engagement as a strategy to promote young people's health.

Learn more about the OPHA Youth Engagement Project and access additional resources on youth engagement by visiting: www.youthengagement.ca

What? - Youth Engagement as a Health Promotion Strategy

What is youth engagement?

Youth engagement is about young people being actively involved in addressing issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe are important (Pereira, 2007). It is about amplifying young people's voices and leadership, creating safe spaces in which they can discuss issues that affect their lives, and supporting them to take action.

There are many different ways that youth can be engaged in public health. Many public health units involve youth in conducting health education workshops, doing outreach in the community, and other awareness-raising activities. Youth across Ontario have also participated in Healthy School committees and advocated for smoke-free policies in their schools, communities, and at the provincial level. Youth can also be involved in planning and evaluating health promotion interventions, from one-off events to large-scale programs.

A multi-sectoral view

The potential of young people to make valuable contributions on social issues is catching on across Ontario. The Ministry of Education encourages students to take an active role in the classroom and education system, including funding student-led projects. The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth seeks to actively involve the children and youth who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act and the Education Act. Youth engagement was a key component in the developmental phase of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' 2011 Youth Policy Framework. Youth are also playing an important role in breaking the stigma of mental illness and helping to create youth-friendly mental health services through the New Mentality program, Children's Mental Health Ontario.

How does youth engagement contribute to public health?

1. Youth engagement responds to the Ontario Public Health Standards, along with other provincial and federal priorities.

The Ontario Public Health Standards (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, 2008) state the minimum criteria for effective practice in public health. Youth are identified in the Standards as one of many community partners with whom Public Health must collaborate to promote health and prevent injuries and substance misuse. Youth engagement is also recognized by both the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as an important strategy for young people's health, development and well-being. Youth engagement is also a priority at the federal-level; it is integrated in Health Canada's Federal Tobacco Control Strategy and is a key strategy among the projects funded through Health Canada's Drug Strategy Community Initiatives.

2. Youth engagement puts the Healthy Schools Model into practice.

Youth participation and empowerment are core principles of the health-promoting school model (International Union for Health Promotion and Education, 2007) and the Ontario Ministry of Education's Foundation for a Healthy School.

3. Youth engagement leads to more effective programs and services.

Involving young people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services makes these programs and services more accessible and responsive to young people's needs and priorities (London et al., 2003).

4. Youth engagement enhances protective factors and resiliency among youth.

Young people can catalyze positive change in the settings in which they live, learn, work, and play (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Delgado & Zhou, 2008). This can enhance protective factors for all youth in the community. Being involved also benefits young people: Youth who are engaged tend to have a greater sense of control, empowerment, meaning and connectedness as well as other social and emotional capacities that enhance well-being and reduce the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours. (see for CEYE, 2003; Oliver et al., 2006; Clea, 2002; CCSA, 2009).

Protective Factors for Substance Misuse/ Illicit Drug Use

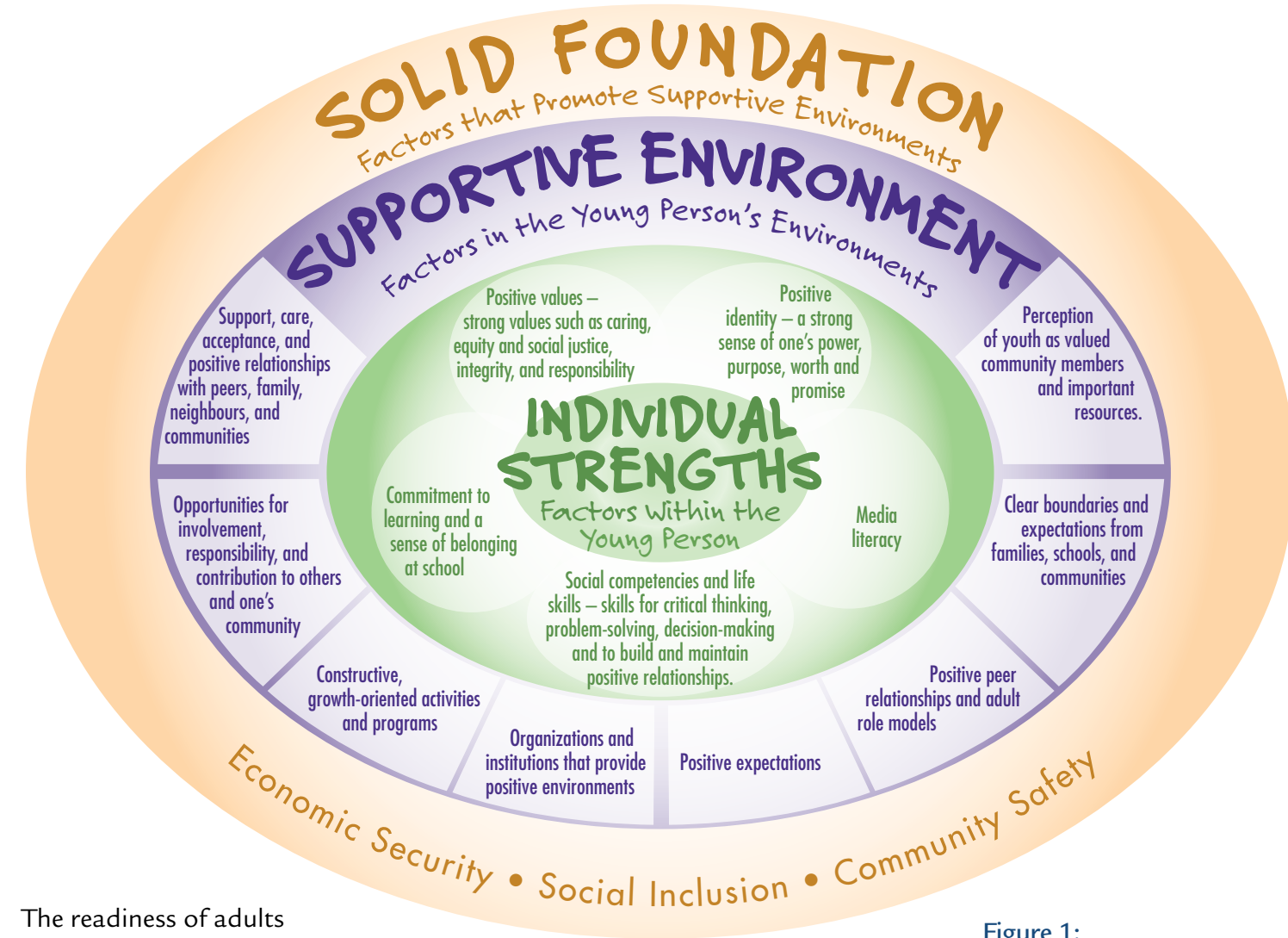
Resiliency supports young people’s health and well-being. It means that they are able to cope with and recover from difficult life situations. Resiliency does not mean that young people will always have happy and productive lives or that they will not face difficulties or challenges. A range of protective factors have been identified that affect young people’s resiliency and, in turn, their health and development (See Figure 1). Individual strengths include factors within the young person such as a positive identity and life skills. Supportive environments are factors in the young person’s environment such as how their family functions and access to growth-oriented activities. A solid foundation includes factors that promote supportive environments such as economic security, social inclusion, and community safety. Social, economic, and political conditions affect young people’s access to these protective factors. Social inequities make it hard for some youth to have or get the social support, education, food, decent housing, and other things they need to live comfortably, take part in society, and feel that they are valued and respected members of the community (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Sabo, 2003; Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Delgado & Zhou, 2008).

How exactly does youth engagement work and how does it promote young people’s health?

Our logic model illustrates the processes and outcomes of youth engagement. The ultimate goal when public health uses youth engagement is for **young people to make healthier decisions about risk-taking behaviours** (See Figure 2). The goal is to reduce negative health, social, and economic consequences of risk-taking behaviours for young people, their families, and communities.

This goal is achieved by **enhancing protective factors** at each of the three levels through youth-driven health promotion action. Young people can draw on the action areas in the World Health Organization’s 1989 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion to catalyze personal and social changes that foster protective factors.

Strengthening young people’s critical health literacy – their ability to gain access to, critically analyze, and understand information as well as to take personal and social action to promote and maintain good health (Nutbeam, 2006) – builds their capacity to successfully undertake health promotion actions.



The readiness of adults to **work with young people in an empowering manner** provides a foundation for successfully engaging youth in making healthier decisions this results in reduced negative health, social, and economic consequences for themselves, their families, and communities. We have identified guiding principles that support adult allies to effectively work with youth and foster active and meaningful youth participation in health promotion.

Figure 1: Protective Factors for Substance Misuse/Illicit Drug Use

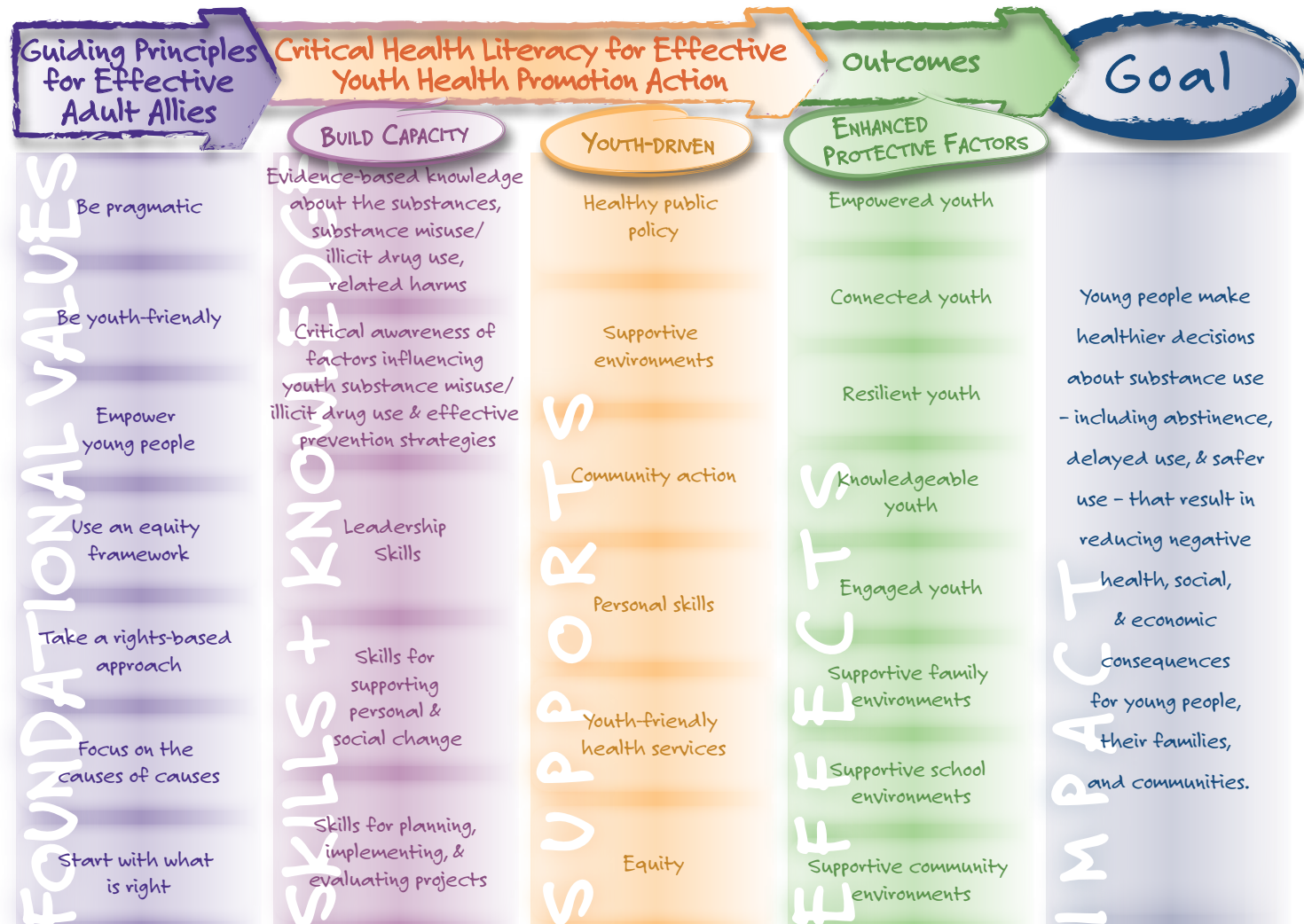


Figure 2: Youth Engagement for Substance Misuse/Illicit Drug Use Prevention Model

You can learn more about each component of this model in the Youth Engagement Toolkit: Working with Middle School Students to Enhance Protective Factors and Resiliency – A Resource for Health Professionals Working with Youth People.

WHAT? – What Roles Can Public Health Play in Youth Engagement?

There are many ways that public health units can encourage the use of youth engagement as a health promotion strategy. Public health staff can:

- * **Administer youth engagement** by designing, coordinating, and/or evaluating youth engagement programs that are facilitated by others. When administering youth engagement projects, public health unit staff may be responsible for building support for youth engagement among their senior management and Board of Directors, researching best practices in youth engagement, developing evidence-based logic models and programs, writing grant proposals, managing the financial and reporting requirements of grants, acting as liaising with funders, hiring and supervising staff and volunteers, and managing internal and external partnerships.

- * **Fund youth engagement** by developing grant programs to support youth-led and/or community-based projects. When funding youth engagement projects, public health unit staff may be responsible for building support for youth engagement among their senior management and Board of Directors, researching best

Tip:

Youth engagement can be time and energy-intensive and works best when adults have the competencies to collaborate with young people. The “right” way for public health units to support youth engagement in their community depends on many factors, including the availability of staff and financial resources.

practices in youth engagement, developing calls for proposals, fostering interest in youth engagement among community partners, evaluating proposals, and overseeing funded projects to ensure financial and programmatic accountability.

- * **Implement youth engagement** by working directly with young people and supporting them to design, implement and/or evaluate health promotion initiatives. When implementing youth engagement, public health unit staff may be responsible for coordinating logistics such as space and food, recruiting and selecting youth group members, planning activities and coordinating speakers to train the youth, supporting the youth to plan and implement their initiatives, and coordinating communications and recognition activities.

- * **Be a champion for youth engagement** by advocating within your public health unit, community, or provincially for policies and funding to support youth engagement. Public health unit staff can be a champion for youth engagement by sharing their knowledge about youth engagement, including its benefits to young people, the organizations that work with them, and the communities in which they live.

- * **Partner in youth engagement** by supporting community partners to implement their youth engagement projects. This may include sitting on advisory committees, acting as a guest speaker, helping community partners learn more about specific health issues.

HOW? – Putting Youth Engagement into Practice: The Youth Engagement Formula

Like other community empowerment approaches, youth engagement is an art rather than a science. It is a process that happens over time, is based on relationships, and works best when tailored to each group of young people and their local context. The following three-factor formula is offered to help you plan, and administer effective and sustainable youth engagement initiatives.

The Youth Engagement Formula



Factor 1: Adequate, appropriate, and sustainable resources

What resources are needed to do youth engagement?

Youth engagement can be done on a shoestring budget or a multi-million dollar budget, depending on your access to funding. Video projects, for example, can be filmed on cellphones, edited on personal computers, and disseminated through social media or filmed by videographers, edited on specialized equipment and disseminated through time bought on TV. Youth can benefit in both cases from the experience of working together and expressing their views and thinking of a solution.

What	Why	How	
		Low Budget Ideas	High Budget Ideas
Dedicated staff with appropriate competencies to engage and work with youth	Youth engagement is a process that requires ongoing planning and coordination. Specialized knowledge is needed to recruit youth, build effective teams, and support the team through the process of developing, planning, implementing and evaluating their projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Hire post-secondary students. * Recruit peer leaders * Support a community partner that already works with youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Have a youth engagement specialist on staff
Youth-friendly space	Youth need to feel comfortable in the space where they will meet. A youth-friendly space is warm, welcoming, inclusive, and convenient for youth. Keep in mind that many youth do not have access to transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Hold project meetings in spaces that youth frequent, like a youth centre or community centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Work with youth to create a youth-friendly space in your public health unit * Train all staff that will interact with the youth to be youth-friendly
Youth-friendly time	Most school-aged youth are available after 4:00pm and on weekends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Work with schools to organize time to meet with the youth during their school day * Hire volunteers, peers, and staff who have the flexibility to work evenings and weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure project facilitators are available during the evenings and weekends. This can be costly depending on employment contracts and collective agreements
Incentives	Many youth engagement projects rely on youth to volunteer their time. Incentives can be used to encourage participation from a broader group of youth and to overcome barriers that would otherwise limit participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Do projects that you know will appeal to your target audience. * Provide snacks or a meal during meetings * Provide transportation support * Organize school credits or reference letters for participation * Solicit prizes and incentives from local stores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide an honorarium or hourly wage for youth participants * Purchase prizes and incentives
Specialists	Many youth engagement projects use specialized skills such as video making, theatre production, or graphic design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ask community partners with specialists on staff to provide the needed services * Ask specialists to volunteer their services. * Partner with groups and organizations that have the needed expertise and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Hire specialists to provide services

What	Why	How	
		Low Budget Ideas	High Budget Ideas
Equipment and supplies	Most youth engagement projects require equipment and supplies, such as cameras, computers, poster boards, sports equipment, and music. The type of equipment and supplies required will vary according to the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Borrow equipment and supplies from a community partner * Ask the youth to bring equipment and supplies that some or many of the youth are likely to have * Use free online services such as social media websites * Partner with groups and organizations that have the needed equipment and supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Purchase or rent professional quality equipment and supplies * Develop customized websites

Factor 2: Strong youth-adult collaboration

What is the role of adults in youth engagement?

The core role of adults in youth engagement is as facilitator and adult ally (Laverack, 2005; Delgado & Staples, 2008; Delgado & Zhou, 2008; CEYE, 2007; Valaitis et al., 2007). **Facilitators** are enablers and catalyzers; their core role is to help individuals and groups tap into their own existing wisdom and assets, gain additional knowledge and skills, and figure out how to work together to achieve their goal.

Which model of working with youth is best for your project?

Some people think that youth engagement programming means that adults must hand overall authority and responsibility to young people, with adults only providing support as requested. This reflects a youth-led model of youth engagement. There are two other broad models: adult-led and youth-adult partnerships. The primary distinguishing factors between these different models is the degree of youth participation and shared decision-making between young people and adults (Pereira, 2007; Delgado & Staples, 2008; Delgado & Zhou, 2008).

Tip:

Be clear about which youth engagement approach you want to use is important for determining the program design and for managing the expectations of participating youth and adults.

The best model for a specific program depends on a number of factors and may also change over time as these factors change. Factors to consider when choosing the model that is most appropriate for your program include:

- * **Staff readiness and capacity to work with young people.** Staff may not feel comfortable or confident in their abilities to facilitate youth engagement programming and may need to start from an adult-led approach and move towards youth-adult partnerships handing over increasing levels of responsibility and decision-making to the youth.
- * **Organizational culture and readiness of the public health unit and community partners.** The areas in which and the degree to which adults can share decision-making with youth depends on the culture and readiness of their organization.
- * **Project/program lifetime.** High levels of youth participation are more feasible when there is a sustainable program with time and resources to build the capacity of youth and adults.
- * **Project timeframe.** More time is needed when decisions are made in collaboration with or by the youth (or any other group). Time-limited projects can constrain the opportunities for participation.
- * **Grant requirements.** Youth engagement is often funded through project grants. You may need to specify conditions like the project goal and output when applying for grants. This will influence the degree of flexibility and input the youth have during project implementation.

* **Group lifetime.** Groups need time to form and learn how to work together. A facilitator can provide much needed structure and leadership in the early stages to help the youth develop into a high functioning team. As the group matures, the youth may be ready to take over or share the leadership of the group with the adult facilitator.

* **Young people's readiness and capacity.** Many young people are not used to being asked for their opinions, developing their own projects, or sharing leadership with adults. Young people's readiness and capacity to lead youth engagement projects develops with time and opportunities.

Who are potential partners in your community?

One way that public health units promote youth health is by seeking to influence the conditions, policies, and practices of the settings where young people live, learn, and play, such as families, schools and communities (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). This often requires developing partnerships with stakeholders in the community.

We have outlined some potential partners for youth engagement along with some possible contributions and considerations.

Potential Partners	Possible Contributions	Considerations
Public health unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Project leadership and management * Influence and advocacy * Human resources – facilitator, guest facilitator, support staff Health knowledge / expertise * Meeting space * Resources – health promotion information and health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Health-focused * Required to respond immediately to health priorities (e.g., H1N1) * Adult authority * Adults promote health and healthy behaviours * Serves all-ages * Typically delivers set programming * Has limited staff time for process-driven activities * Potentially intimidating clinical environment * Well resourced * Potentially overcommitted
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Influence and advocacy * Human resources – support staff * Education knowledge / expertise * Knowledge / expertise relating to youth * Meeting or event space * Resource – educational supports, sporting goods supplies, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Education-focused * Adult authority * Adult-led education and extra-curricular activities * Serves children and youth * Familiar youth-oriented environment * Often responding to multiple priorities with dwindling resources
Community centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Project leadership and management * Influence and advocacy * Human resources – facilitator, guest facilitator, support staff * Varied knowledge and expertise * Potential knowledge / expertise relating to youth * Meeting or event space * Resources – sport / activity-oriented supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Recreation, and leisure-focused * Adult authority * Adults/older youth instruct lessons or supervise drop-in programs * Serves all-ages * Various facilities – gym, pool, courts * Potentially a youth-friendly environment
Faith-based organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Project leadership and management * Human resources – facilitator, guest facilitator, support staff * Religious knowledge / expertise * Potential knowledge / expertise relating to youth * Meeting or event space * Resources – religious information, community partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Faith-focused * Adult authority * Adult-led education and activities * Preach and teach lessons * Serves all ages * Formal, regimented environment
Activity-based organization (sport, art, games, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Project leadership and management * Human resources – facilitator, guest facilitator, support staff * Activity based knowledge and expertise * Potential knowledge / expertise relating to youth * Meeting or event space * Resources – sport / activity-oriented supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Activity-focused * Activity expert authority * Expert instructs and coaches * Serves all-ages * Activity-focused environment

Factor 3: A facilitated process

What is the process for meaningfully engaging youth?

Turning the theory of youth engagement into action can seem like a daunting task. Our model of youth engagement provides a roadmap to guide you through the process. The five phases outlined below are fluid, emergent and overlapping; it is normal to move back and forth through the phases in a nonlinear way. The process works best when it is iterative and developmental, with one cycle building upon and leading to the next. This enhances the capacity of the involved adults and youth to work together to design, implement, and evaluate health promotion action projects.

OPHA's five-phase model of youth engagement provides a roadmap to guide you through the process (see Figure 3). These five phases are fluid, emergent and overlapping; it is normal to move back and forth through the phases in a nonlinear way. The process works best when it is iterative and developmental, with one cycle building on and leading to the next. This enhances the capacity of the involved adults and youth to work together to design, implement, and evaluate health promotion action projects.

Tip:

These strategies can be used in Phase 2 to build the capacity of youth, in Phase 3 to explore the problem and identify the issue of focus, or by the youth in Phase 4 to catalyze personal and social change in their communities.

The five phases are:

Phase 1: Get Ready for Youth Engagement

* Prepare yourself, your team, and your organization to be increasingly youth-friendly and to work with youth instead of for youth. This often means reflecting on and changing one's practices, policies, and partnerships.

Phase 2: Build the Team and Their Capacity

* Support the youth to systematically explore the problem or issue, its consequences and root causes, and existing assets that can be harnessed and strengthened; and to identify the issue they want to focus on.

Phase 3: Explore the Problem and Identify the Issue of Focus

* Support the youth to identify the issue they want to focus on and to systematically explore the problem or issue, its consequences and root causes, and existing assets that can be harnessed and strengthened.

Phase 4: Plan and Act

* Develop and implement a plan for creating a health promotion action project to catalyze personal and social change. Keep the plan on track by taking time to review progress and reflect on process.

Phase 5: Reflect, Evaluate, and Celebrate

* Take time to look back on the health promotion action project, reflect on what has been learned and changed, and celebrate the young people's accomplishments.

Learn more about the process of youth engagement and find strategies and activities for each phase in the OPHA's Youth Engagement Toolkit – www.youthengagement.ca.

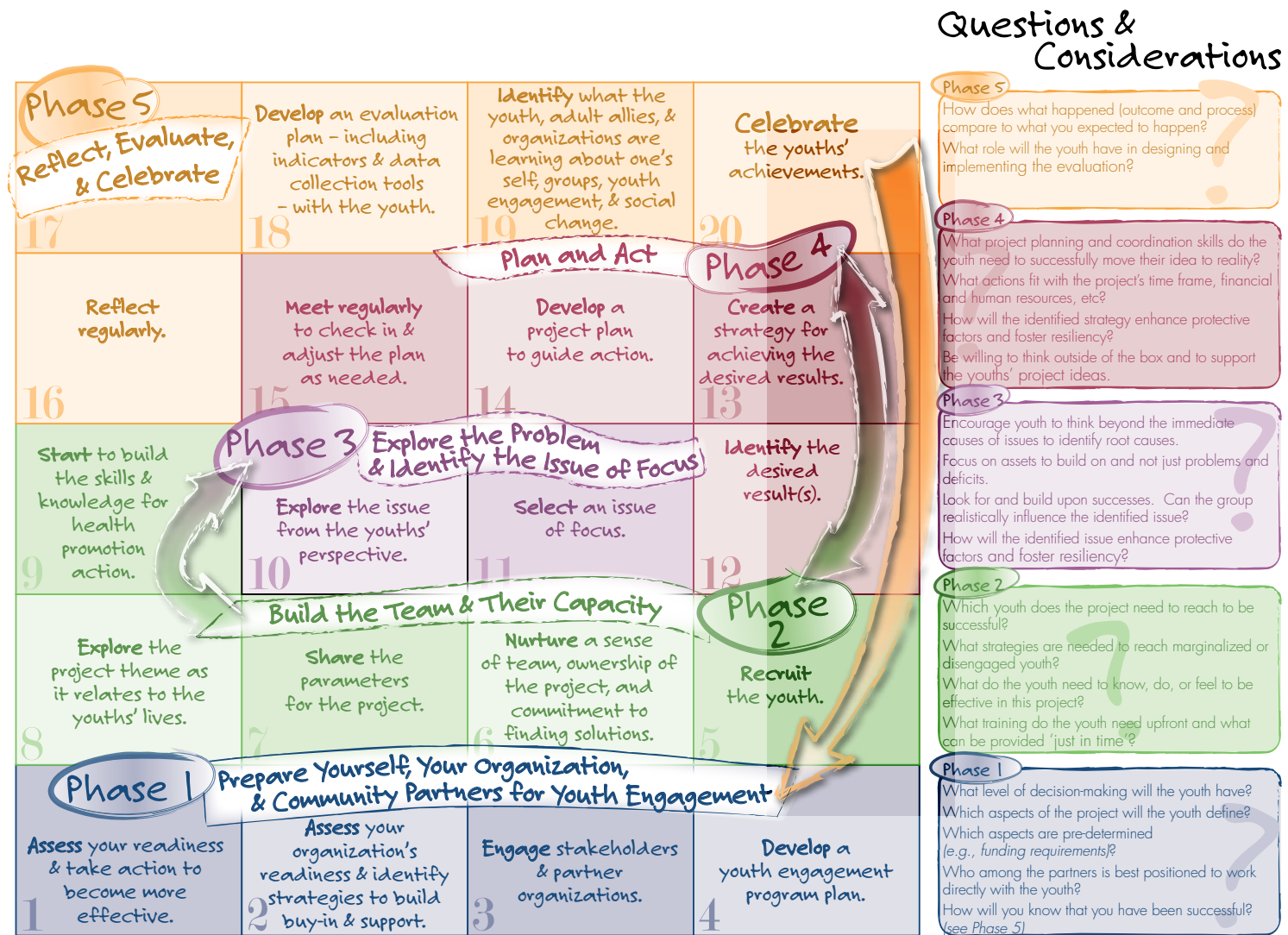


Figure 3: What are strategies for engaging youth in the core group and in the community?

The goal of the youth engagement process is not to “race to the end.” Rather, the process is as important as the end product. The process works best when it is responsive, dynamic and non-linear. Expect movement back and forth between the phases.

What are strategies for engaging youth in the core group and in the community?

Some common strategies used in youth engagement are arts-informed approaches such as drama and videos, sports and play, social media, and dialogical methodologies. A common feature across these strategies is that the facilitator creates a structure through which the group can participate in an activity or experience and then uses a guided conversation to encourage group members to reflect on and make sense of what happened, how they felt, and how it relates to their real world experiences.

Youth-Friendly Engagement Strategies

Strategy	Rationale	Examples
Arts-informed approaches	Arts and culture approaches provide youth with tools to create a common identity, explore important issues and social injustices, communicate their visions for change, and get heard by their peers, parents, teachers, and other community members. Arts and culture approaches also helps to attract new members and sustain the energy of existing members; some youth will come for the arts and may find themselves increasingly interested in the issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Digital media * Visual art * Music * Spoken word poetry * Drama * Dance
Sports and play	Sports and play can be used to help youth explore health promotion issues. Games can be used as a metaphor and an experience that acts as a launching pad for learning about values –fair play, teamwork, respect, and participation – or specific public health issues. Sporting events can be used to attract large numbers of youth; health promotion messages can be integrated into the event. Sports and play also provides opportunities for youth to be physically active, make friends, build life skills, and gain leadership skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Intramural league * Sports event * Games for team-building * Games to explore public health issues
Social media	Social media provides space for identity exploration, self-expression, and creativity; enhances accessibility for youth with low-literacy (i.e., video and sound clips can be augmented text); promotes youth leadership; and equalizes interactions between adults and youth in ways that are not always possible offline (Norman, personal communication, August 30, 2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Discussion forums * Blogs * Social networking * Video/audio/image sharing * Wikis
Dialogical methodologies	Dialogical methodologies are based on the idea that conversations help people better understand themselves, their communities, and the issues that affect their lives, and can spark personal and social change (Bojer et al., 2006).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * World Café * Open Space Technology * Appreciative Inquiry

Sustaining Youth Engagement

Many youth engagement programs are funded through project grants that last only one to three years. Projects may come and go, but using youth engagement as a health promotion strategy doesn't have to. Youth engagement is an approach – a way of doing things. Youth engagement can be sustained within a public health unit over the long-term by:

- * **Institutionalization:** Ensure youth engagement is recognized as an important component of a comprehensive health promotion approach in your public health unit. Champion youth engagement as a best practice in youth health promotion. Integrate youth engagement in strategy documents, policies, work plans and other documents that describe the priorities and approaches of programs and operations within your public health unit and department. Advocate for core funding to be dedicated to youth engagement programs and activities.
- * **Capacity building:** Use grants and other funding opportunities to build the knowledge and skills of staff to use a youth engagement approach.
- * **Developing strategic partnerships:** Build relationships with other youth-serving and youth-led organizations committed to youth engagement.

- * **Ongoing resource development:** Ensure that staff have sufficient time and capacity to research potential funding opportunities and write grants. Provide opportunities for staff to learn about grant-writing. Build relationships with potential funders. Be creative – consider non-health funding sources like the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts and integrate youth engagement components into larger funding proposals.
- * **Building an evidence-base of your successes:** Develop an evaluation framework that will enable you to demonstrate the impacts of your youth engagement initiatives in strengthening protective factors in your community. Collect stories from youth group members, parents, community partners, and other stakeholders to illustrate positive outcomes.

Examples of potential funding sources for youth engagement

Level	Funder
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund JW McConnell Family Foundation The Counseling Foundation of Canada Canada Council for the Arts
Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ontario Trillium Foundation Ontario Ministry of Education – Speak Up Projects Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion – Healthy Communities Fund Laidlaw Foundation Ontario Arts Council
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United Way Community foundations, such as Maytree and the Toronto Community Foundation in the Greater Toronto Area Service groups, such as The Lions Clubs and The Kinsmen Local councils Local businesses Local faith groups

