



# Engaging Youth in Research and Evaluation: Benefits for Youth & Organizations

## FACTSHEET

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### We are all about youth, so how can we include them in an evaluation of our program?

**Evaluation is always better** when stakeholders are engaged in the process. In youth work, who has more at stake in the outcomes than youth themselves? Meaningful youth involvement in research and evaluation can support the outcomes that the youth sector is working to achieve. Youth engagement improves the overall quality of evaluation and benefits the wider community as a whole. Evaluation does *not* have to get in the way of good youth work.

### Youth engagement vs. youth engagement in research evaluation: What's the difference?

**Youth Engagement** is when young people actively participate in the world beyond themselves. Engaged youth have opportunities to make meaningful and impactful contributions to society.

**Youth Engagement in Evaluation** is when young people make meaningful contributions to researching and evaluating the programs, organizations, and systems designed to serve them.

### What are the benefits for youth engaged in research and evaluation?



**1. Skill Development:** Youth learn research and associated academic skills like critical thinking and public speaking. These skills contribute to job readiness.



**2. Social Competencies:** Doing research and evaluation is a great way for youth to cultivate social skills. Youth learn to work in a team, see problems and solutions from different angles, and appreciate the perspectives of others.



**3. Self-Confidence:** When youth collaborate and contribute, they recognize that they have valuable

knowledge and insights to share. This recognition contributes to a sense of personal efficacy.



**4. Identity Exploration:** Engaging in research and evaluation enables youth to take on new roles and broaden their perspectives. With this comes a sense of empowerment and possibility.



**5. Civic Competencies:** A sense of social responsibility can emerge when youth feel like they have a voice and that their voice matters.



**6. Social Capital:** With a collaborative approach, youth can build relationships with peers and adults that offer new perspectives and opportunities.

### What are the benefits for organizations that involve youth in research and evaluation?



**1. Forming Questions:** Youth bring new perspectives, often asking questions that adults may not think of.



**2. Data Collection Tools and Quality:** Youth can help develop more appropriate data collection tools. When engaged in data collection, youth have the advantage over adults of often being more accessible and relatable to their peers.



**3. Knowledge Creation/Improved Understanding:** Youth can provide a different perspective to analysis, resulting in new interpretations, insights, and solutions.



**4. Mobilization:** Youth can communicate findings in their own words, craft messages that connect with their peers, and often, they can effectively employ new media and technologies.



**5. Capacity Building:** Youth involvement in research and evaluation builds organizational capacity.

## How can youth be involved in evaluation?

- Developing evaluation questions
- Creating data collection instruments and gathering data
- Identifying and recruiting participants
- Interpreting and analyzing findings
- Presenting findings
- Making recommendations for change; using findings for advocacy

## What are barriers to youth engagement?

- **Costs and Time:** Often, programs and organizations do not have the funding and resources to train and support youth as researchers.
- **Tokenism and Burnout:** When we have one youth involved, we often say we have a “youth voice”. However, when youth engagement is done right, there are numerous youth perspectives. When the same youth are called upon all the time, causing them to do most of the work, this can cause burnout and cynicism.
- **Logistical Issues:** The timing and location of meetings often occur when youth are in school or where youth cannot access programs easily.
- **“Adultism”:** This refers to the belief that young people lack intelligence or ability. ‘Adultism’ is supported by societal norms that leave young people feeling that they are not valued, respected, or heard.

## What are some recommendations for engaging youth in research and evaluation?

**1. Critical Positive Youth Development:** Recognize and draw on youth strengths (culture, experience, community connections). Address barriers to participation and find solutions to them (training, mentorship, stipend, travel subsidy, hourly wage if possible).

**2. Provide Structure for Meaningful Participation:** Encourage knowledge building by teaching youth how to conduct and critique research. Focus on skill building by showing how to design a project, and collect, analyze, synthesize and mobilize findings.

**3. Peer or Adult Research and Evaluation Mentors:** It is essential to provide opportunities to see skills modeled, ask critical questions, gain new perspectives, build teamwork and a sense of collective responsibility.

**4. Collaborative Work:** Remind each other that no one knows everything, but together we know a lot!

**5. Complete Something:** Design meaningful projects that “matter” and can be completed in the span of your time together.

**6. Share and Celebrate!** Be proud of the work you’ve created and share it with others.