

Personal Meaning Map

In a Personal Meaning Map, youth candidly draw or write connections they have to ideas and/or concepts. This tool can be used to interpret youth's understanding and attitudes toward a variety of concepts and ideas.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

This is a small- to medium-size group activity. Facilitators should be sure to make their focus phrase related to the program being evaluated and the evaluation goals (i.e., a few words or a sentence).

PREPARATION

- Determine the focus phrase to be used. For example, if the goal of the evaluation is to understand how youth conceptualize and/or feel about the program, the focus phrase could be the name of the program. This activity can also be done to explore more general terms attached to program initiatives/goals, including, for example, understanding youth's perceptions of body image, homelessness or social justice.
- Print 8 ½ by 11 sheets of paper with the focus phrase written in a bubble in the centre of the page.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Facilitators distribute the focus phrase handout to youth.
2. Facilitators ask youth to draw or write any words, ideas or images they connect to the focus phrase. Note: it is important to remind youth that there are no right or wrong answers when they are completing this activity; the purpose of the activity is to outline what the focus phrase represents to them.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Youth participants and the program facilitator(s).

WHAT DO I NEED?

- 8 ½ by 11 paper.
- Writing and/or drawing instruments.
- Shared space for youth to draw/write individually and then discuss as a group, or a shared online platform.

WHEN SHOULD THIS BE DONE?

This activity can be done at any time throughout a program cycle; however, it is encouraged to run the activity towards the beginning of a program session to ensure youth are optimally engaged.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

30 minutes to an hour.

3. Once completed, facilitators ask the youth how they found the exercise. Was it easy or difficult? What did they enjoy/not enjoy? If youth are comfortable, ask them to share their Map with the group. (Facilitators can take notes or audio-record the session with youth consent.) Facilitators are encouraged to ask youth follow-up questions to show interest and gain further clarification. Facilitators could also ask youth to put their Maps together, into a collage, for example, and take a picture to illustrate what the focus phrase means to the group as a whole.
4. How facilitators interpret youth's Maps will depend on the purpose of the evaluation.
5. Facilitators may want to look at the quantity of words and ideas, the scope of concepts shared, the degree of emotion captured, overlapping themes across youth's Maps, etc.

FACILITATING ONLINE

1. Email youth the handout with the focus phrase already typed out in the centre of the document, or have youth create a new document and type in the focus phrase themselves. Youth can then print it off and draw and write on paper or they can complete the Map on their computer/device.
2. The activity should be delivered live using an online platform to allow youth the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion in real time. You may even consider using an online tool, like Google Jamboard, for live engagement.

3. Youth can share their completed Maps by holding them up to the camera or sharing their screens as they discuss what they created. Additionally, facilitators could ask youth to send their completed Maps by email or to take and submit pictures of their Maps.

GOOD TO KNOW

Personal Meaning Maps can work as a pre/post evaluation activity, or as a retrospective pre/post evaluation activity (by asking youth to make two Maps next to one other – one representing their thoughts/feelings before participating and one representing their thoughts/feelings after participating).

LEARN MORE

Grack Nelson, A., & Ostgaard, G. (2012). *Measuring learning in youth development programs using Personal Meaning Maps*. Science Museum of Minnesota. Poster at American Evaluation Association Conference, October 2012.

Falk, J. H., Moussouri, T., & Coulson, D. (1998). The effect of visitors' agendas on museum learning. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 41(2), 107-120.