

## FACTSHEET

# TEN PRACTICES FOR MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING YOUTH



**01. Engage youth as partners**, with the power to contribute to decision-making processes throughout program design, implementation, and evaluation.<sup>1-8</sup> Be open to the new ways of thinking and working that youth bring to the table.<sup>9</sup> As Serisha Iyar, Executive Director at Leading in Colour, advises, support youth in “dreaming bigger”.<sup>9</sup>

**02. Be transparent with youth about the limitations to sharing power**, and keep in mind that equal decision-making may sometimes not be possible (e.g., when youth lack technical skills required to do the work, or when adult staff are financially responsible).<sup>3,5</sup> Communicate any limitations, such as timelines, funding, and other practical constraints.<sup>9</sup>

**03. Support youth by providing ‘scaffolding’** – gradually increasing the level of responsibility and leadership youth take on.<sup>1,6,7,10</sup> Avoid making assumptions about young people’s needs; instead, ask youth for direction on how you can best support their engagement.<sup>9</sup>

**04. Evaluate the current level of youth leadership and engagement in your program/organization and reflect on your own biases.** Assess the capacity of adult staff to shift from traditional roles of ‘teacher’ or ‘program leader’ to a more collaborative, supportive, or facilitating role.<sup>1,7,10</sup> Training can be used to challenge stereotypes, examine adultism, and encourage respectful collaboration.

**05. Recognize the barriers to engagement that youth with intersecting identities may face, and provide support to address these barriers** (e.g., provide food, transportation, flexible meeting times, stipends, etc.).<sup>11</sup> Remember that youth may have many interests and commitments and match the level of intensity of their responsibilities in your project with their life circumstances.<sup>3,5,6,12</sup>

**06. Ensure that engagement opportunities support youth to build skills and capacities.**<sup>3,8,11,13</sup>

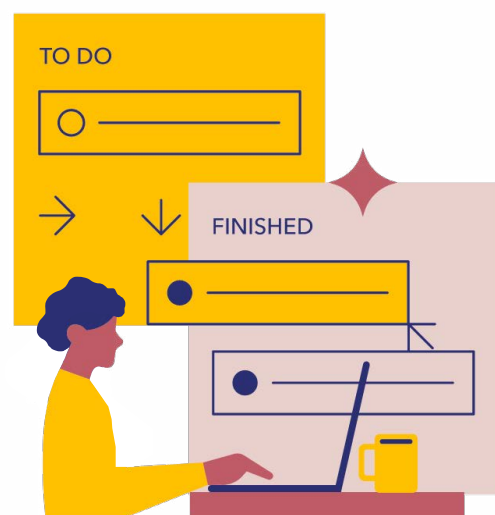
Consider providing formal or informal training, as needed, to make sure youth have the skills they need to participate (e.g., communication or technical skills, etc.).<sup>5,14</sup>

**07. Build in strategic mentorship opportunities to enhance skill-building.**<sup>5,8,12</sup> Youth should feel connected and supported;<sup>14</sup> they should have access not just to physical space and resources, but also to caring adults and communities that they can count on.<sup>4</sup>

**08. Embrace challenges and problem-solving.** If possible, engagement opportunities should allow youth to work on a challenge that is interesting to them and directly relates to their everyday lives.<sup>3,8,14</sup>

**09. Recognize that youth will not participate in the program forever.** As youth ‘age out’ of your program or move on to other opportunities, consider actively recruiting new participants and developing new, more challenging roles for youth who have been involved longer.<sup>5</sup>

**10. Build reflection and evaluation into your program** to identify strengths and opportunities associated with youth engagement. Use this information to help improve your program and share your findings with others.<sup>5-7,12</sup>



## ENDNOTES

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