



Youth-Adult Partnerships in the Evaluation Process

A RATIONALE FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

This tool kit emphasizes that both youth and adults make important and essential contributions to any evaluation effort. In particular, young people have important insights into what needs to be evaluated. They bring fresh approaches to data collection and analysis.

Engaging young people in *community building* is a process through which young people and adults work as partners to examine their community, create a vision for the future, and implement an action plan that leads to desired change. But *planning* and *doing* are only the beginning. Evaluation is needed to determine what worked, what didn't, and what should be done differently. Evaluation also helps the team determine whether it achieved the desired results. A community-building effort is not complete without evaluation. And, as with the planning and doing, it is important that young people be involved as partners in the evaluation.

... the mutual contributions of youth and adults can result in a synergy, a new power and energy that propels decision-making groups to greater innovation and productivity.

ZELDIN, MCDANIEL, TOPITZES, AND CALVERT (2000)

Adults have long recognized that young people are able-bodied implementers of community-building efforts. Consequently, the phase of community building in which young people are most frequently seen working side-by-side with adults is program implementation.

Recently, young people have become more involved in planning community-building efforts. The widespread infusion of young people on planning boards, councils, and committees has served to give them a greater voice in determining the direction that community-building efforts should take.

The phase of community building in which young people tend to be least involved is evaluation. For one reason or another, adults have continued to take the lead in the evaluation process. Perhaps adults see evaluation as being far too complicated for young people. But research has shown that young people rise to the challenge, growing and stretching into their new roles as evaluators (Sabo, 2003).

As you work with the activities in this tool kit, remember to include a focus on youth involvement in the evaluation process. You will find tips and activities for involving youth as partners throughout the following pages.

Where possible, evaluators should attempt to foster the social equity of the evaluation, so that those who give to the evaluation can receive some benefits in return. Evaluators should seek to ensure that those who bear the burdens of contributing data ... are doing so willingly ... and have maximum feasible opportunity to obtain benefits that may be produced from the evaluation.

AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION (1999)

SUMMARY: WHY INVOLVE YOUTH IN EVALUATION?

Respond to Youth Stakeholders: Youth are directly affected by evaluation results, and involving them in evaluation empowers them to use their leadership skills to effect change.

Enhance Evaluation Design: As important stakeholders in programs, youth can provide valuable input on designing youth-friendly evaluation tools.

Equalize the Power Between Youth and Adults: Programs can actively involve youth in designing evaluation tools, pilot testing them, collecting data from their peers, reviewing evaluation results, and making suggestions for modifying practices.

Facilitate Sound Youth Development: Youth can directly apply their leadership skills through the process of learning to build community relationships and understanding real-world experiences.

Promote Youth Involvement in Community Change: Youth can practice real-life community involvement through data collection, reflection, and action.

A FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN EVALUATION

Lofquist (1989) identified a continuum of attitudes that adults may have toward young people. These attitudes affect the degree to which young people are involved in community-building efforts. That continuum, as adapted by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2001), is represented below.

Youth as Objects	Adults exercise arbitrary and nearly total control over youth.
Youth as Recipients	Actions of adults are based on what they believe is good for young people.
Youth as Resources	Young people provide input into decisions, but they are still primarily in a helping role.
Youth as Partners	Youth and adults equally share decision-making power and responsibility.

How do the attitudes of adults affect how young people are involved in the evaluation of community building? The chart on page 6 identifies the role young people might play in evaluation from each of the four perspectives. The activities on pp. 7-15 allow you to explore how young people are involved in different ways in your own community, challenges to their full involvement, and how you can work to increase their involvement. For more activities and tips on youth-adult partnerships, see *Youth-Adult Partnerships: A Training Manual* (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003).

A CONTINUUM OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN EVALUATION

	YOUTH AS OBJECTS	YOUTH AS RECIPIENTS	YOUTH AS RESOURCES	YOUTH AS PARTNERS
RELATIONSHIP	Youth are evaluation objects.	Adults allow youth to participate in selected evaluation activities.	Adults view contributions of youth as beneficial, but they retain control.	Youth and adults share responsibility for the evaluation.
EVALUATION QUESTIONS	Evaluation questions are based on adult needs for information.	Evaluation questions are based on what adults believe they need to know to help youth.	Evaluation questions are developed with input from youth.	Evaluation questions are jointly developed by adults and youth.
METHODOLOGIES	Evaluation methods are determined by adults. Activities are performed by adults.	Adults determine evaluation methods, and they create situations in which young people learn from involvement.	Youth help adults decide on evaluation methods and help with evaluation activities.	Youth and adults jointly decide on evaluation activities. Activities are performed by youth and adults.
ANALYSIS OF DATA	Adults analyze data in ways that make sense to them.	Adults determine how data will be analyzed, and they create situations in which young people learn from involvement.	Youth help adults decide how data will be analyzed and help with analysis.	Youth and adults jointly analyze data.
EVALUATION USE	Adults use findings for their benefit.	Adults use findings in a manner they believe is in the best interest of young people.	Young people provide input regarding use of the findings.	Youth and adults use findings for their mutual benefit.
BENEFITS	Youth receive no benefit from involvement in the process. Youth indirectly benefit from the findings.	Youth receive limited benefit from involvement in the process. Youth indirectly benefit from the findings.	Youth receive moderate benefit from involvement in the process. Youth directly benefit from the findings.	Youth receive significant benefit from involvement in the process. Youth directly benefit from the findings.