



Engage Youth! Colorado's Guide to Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

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of Public Health
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Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

September 29, 2008

Dear Citizens of Colorado:

I am pleased to write this letter expressing the strong support of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (the department) for the work of the Youth Partnership for Health. For the past eight years, diverse youth ages 14-18 from across Colorado have come together monthly to provide guidance to our department and other state programs and initiatives addressing the health of adolescents.

The department began the Youth Partnership for Health (YPH) in 2000 because we know that ideas and input from youth are vital to the success of any program targeting youth. Since its inception, YPH has provided feedback and recommendations to many programs and initiatives that resulted in policy and practice changes, written articles for Colorado prevention newsletters, presented and served as workshop assistants at statewide conferences, and provided technical assistance to various public and private partners. Most recently, YPH has developed an original DVD and this accompanying guidebook on effective youth-adult partnerships, which is being distributed nationally.

It has been our pleasure to promote effective youth-adult partnerships by supporting YPH, and we hope this guidebook serves as a valuable resource for others who are interested in creating opportunities for youth-adult partnerships.

Sincerely,


James B. Martin
Executive Director

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Acknowledgements

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The guide also is available online at www.healthyyouthcolorado.org

For more information on Colorado's Youth Partnership for Health

- Visit www.healthyyouthcolorado.org
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A special thanks to the Center for Systems Integration for its exemplary work in preparing the guide. For more information regarding the Center for Systems Integration

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This guide is a resource for any organization seeking to develop and maintain a successful youth-adult partnership effort. Youth-adult partnerships are a powerful approach to improving policies, programs and practices related to youth. Partnerships require a shift in how youth think about adults and adults think about youth, and this guide provides insight into how to make that transition successful.

Using the experiences of the Colorado Youth Partnership for Health and many other national resources, this guide is filled with tips that are tried and tested by youth and adults.

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Overview of Youth-Adult Partnerships

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What is a Youth-Adult Partnership?

Youth-adult partnerships are based on the understanding that young people have a right to participate in programs that affect them and that, with training and assistance, they can become powerful advocates for positive change (UNFPA, 2008). Youth-adult partnerships can take on many forms, from youth involvement and engagement to youth leadership and policy boards. A youth-adult partnership occurs when adults and youth share responsibility for decisions related to issues directly affecting the lives of youth.

Youth-adult partnerships can take many forms and have different types of decision-making roles. Sometimes a youth-adult partnership plays an advisory role to a program or policy-making body, reviewing and discussing important issues before coming to recommendations. Other youth-adult partnerships share directly in the decision-making, either by having the authority to make decisions themselves or by participating as youth representatives on the "adult" boards invested with decision-making authority.

Youth play an important role in everything from the first steps of helping to design a new program or

policy to the evaluation of a program or policy's success. In fact, the roles that youth can take are as varied as the roles of adults. They are limited only by the willingness of everyone involved to engage young voices in important issues.

Youth Infusion, an organization created and run by young people, says, "Targeting youth without first engaging youth is inefficient, ineffective and inconsistent with their rights and competencies. Yet translating the idea of youth participation into effective, everyday practice is hard to do. Organizations are increasingly in need of how-to guidance to shift from working **for** youth to working **with** youth. Agencies and individuals do exist to provide concrete, how-to guidance." For more information, go to www.youthinfusion.com

Why is Youth-Adult Partnership Important?

Youth voice - the perspectives, ideas, experiences, knowledge and actions of young people - is vital to the success of any program targeting youth. Research supports

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the value of youth involvement, not just for the youth, but for adults and organizations too. The success of youth involvement efforts is widely recognized, so widely that there are international efforts to engage youth as leaders in policy and program design and delivery.

Organizational structures and systems usually are built around the needs of adults, not of youth. By analyzing the structure of organizations, establishing youth-adult work groups and advisory boards, training youth and adults in cooperative decision-making, and updating institutional cultures, an effective youth-adult partnership can enhance an organization's capacity to meet its youth-related goals, and organizations can move from simply providing youth services to engaging youth in the development of policy and programs (Youth Infusion Brochure on www.youthinfusion.com, accessed May 15, 2008).

What Does "Partnership" Really Mean?

"Partnership" means sharing power. A youth-adult partnership is a real partnership only if the youth and the adults have the ability to make decisions TOGETHER!

An important part of making decisions together is trusting in the expertise and knowledge of everyone at the table.

- Adults - Remember that youth are the experts in today's youth culture. Things have changed since you were a kid.
- Youth - Remember that adults are the experts in many of the issues they work on. Take the time to learn from them too.

Youth Infusion Says, "One of society's greatest resources is its youth, but youth require guidance, experience and support. Youth working alongside adults is the winning combination for positive social change. What could be more powerful than youth serving as the experts on youth-focused issues?"

How Is a Youth-Adult Partnership Different from a Youth Program?

A youth program is one-way commitment from adults to help youth. A youth-adult partnership program is a two-way commitment from adults to help youth by

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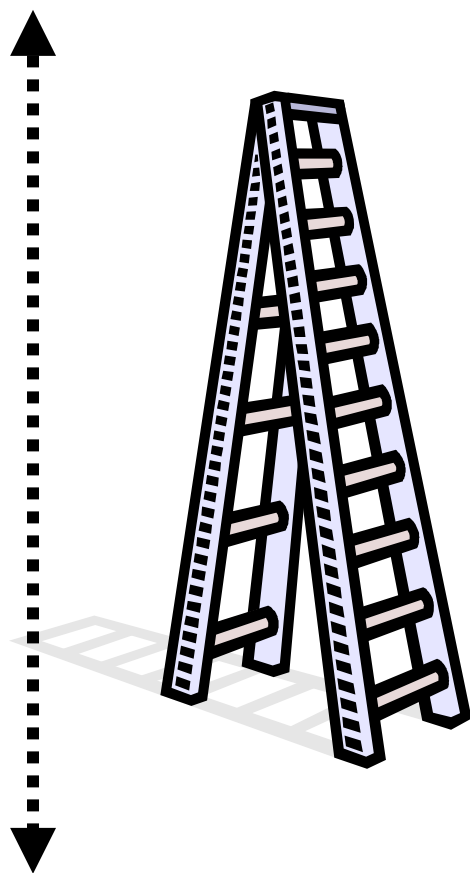
establishing policies and programs that understand youth and from youth to help adults understand youth issues. Everyone benefits, including the youth.

In a youth program, youth don't share power with adults. In a partnership, they do. Sharing power can happen in many ways and at many levels, with youth as objects of adult decision-making; recipients of adults' ideas; or partners with adults, initiating ideas and shaping decisions (Texas Network, 2002).

Ladder of Youth Participation

Adapted from Hart, R. (1994).

Youth as Partners (Maximum Youth Involvement)



- Youth and adults initiate and direct actions together. Decision-making authority is shared.
- Adults initiate actions, and share decisions with youth.
- Youth are consulted and informed about actions.
- Youth are informed about actions and assigned tasks.
- Youth are decorations and/or tokens, where the organization creates a false appearance of including youth (i.e., they may be sitting at the table, but are not given the opportunity or power to provide input).
- Youth are used solely to communicate adults' messages.

Youth as Objects (Minimum Youth Involvement)

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Reasons to Start a Youth-Adult Partnership

Organizations might want to start a youth-adult partnership, if they see value in

- ◆ having more diverse perspectives in their decision-making processes;
- ◆ engaging the perspective of youth, knowing that it will differ from an adult's perspective;
- ◆ incorporating specific knowledge in their decision-making - knowledge that young people are more likely to have;
- ◆ creating opportunities for leadership and partnership for youth;
- ◆ acknowledging the importance of youth participation in any program (Texas Network, 2002).

Research and Benefits of Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

Research demonstrates that engaging youth voice is an essential element of effective organizational development among community and youth-serving organizations (Zeldin, 2004). Involving the target population in the identification of needs and the development of high-quality programs is one way of improving current prevention programs (Olsen, Goddard, Solheim & Sandt, 2004). In 1981, Rappaport stated that prevention programs are more successful if members of the target audience are involved and empowered in addressing their own needs. In addition, other scholars have noted the merits of involving people in the discovery process and solution (Greene, 1987; Greene, 1988). It is likely that such a participatory approach to developing programs for youth would provide similar positive effects. Moreover, it is vital to consider young people's ideas and input, rather than rely exclusively on adults' understanding of issues when developing prevention programs (Olsen, Goddard, Solheim & Sandt, 2004).

The bottom line is that involving young people in program development and implementation can increase the potential for success. Research indicates that programs using youth-adult partnerships often demonstrate greater effectiveness, and offer potential benefits not only to youth, but to the adults and organizations that serve them.

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Adult benefits of effectively using the voice of young people include

- ◆ experiencing the competence of young people and viewing them as legitimate, crucial contributors to organizational decision-making processes;
- ◆ enhancing commitment and energy to the adult's organization;
- ◆ feeling more effective and confident in working with and relating to youth;
- ◆ developing a stronger sense of community connectedness;
- ◆ enhancing strategies for how to most effectively listen to and communicate with youth (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert, 2000).

Organizational benefits of effectively using the voice of youth include

- ◆ developing more effective youth-serving programs, initiatives and/or organizations;
- ◆ strengthening the organization's focus on its youth-serving mission;
- ◆ becoming more connected and responsive to youth in the organization's community;
- ◆ placing greater value on inclusiveness and diverse representation;
- ◆ becoming more appealing to potential funders (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert, 2000).

Youth benefits of effectively using the voice of youth include

- ◆ increasing self-esteem, sense of personal control and enhanced identity development;
- ◆ increasing academic achievement;
- ◆ enhancing development of life skills including leadership, public speaking and job responsibility;
- ◆ strengthening communication skills with adults, peers and family;
- ◆ decreasing loneliness, shyness and hopelessness;
- ◆ decreasing involvement in risky behaviors, such as drug use, leading to an increase in overall safety (Scales & Leffert, 1997).

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"[Young people] need ample opportunities to try on the adult roles they are preparing for. This means they need to participate in making age-appropriate decisions for themselves and others, ranging from deciding what activities to participate in to choosing responsible alternatives to negative behaviors ... They also need to practice taking leadership roles ...[and] need to experience themselves as individuals who have something of value to contribute to their different communities." -Dr. James Connell, Co-Founder and President of the Institute for Research and Reform in Education based in Philadelphia.

**Examples of
Successful
Youth-Adult
Partnerships**

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The International Experience

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Youth Partnerships

The **United Nations Population Fund** works with young people to build on and use their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm in a wide variety of activities, initiatives and programs. Representatives of UNFPA feel that including young people in program and policy decisions not only helps prepare youth to exercise the rights and responsibilities of adulthood and citizenship, but that it is also essential to the development of successful programs.

UNFPA Youth Partnership's Key Program: Global Youth Advisory Panel

This is a committee of young people aged 15-24 from developing and developed countries that gives advice on promoting the rights and needs of youth within the **United Nations Population Fund**. The members represent a wide variety of national, regional and international youth organizations, and make comprehensive annual recommendations on planning, policy-making and programs. The panel's 2005 recommendations included setting up national Youth Advisory Panels to ensure that the needs of youth are considered in the development of processes in participating countries. Twenty countries currently are establishing Youth Advisory Panels.

UNFPA Contact Info: For more information and to contact the UNFPA, visit <http://www.unfpa.org/adolescents/initiatives.htm>.

The National Experience

Here in our country, youth-adult partnership efforts are widely underway. They take many different forms, from advisory and leadership groups, to organizations run by youth with assistance from adults, to training opportunities for youth and adults to learn together. The descriptions below are drawn from the websites of each of the groups. For more information, please contact them.

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America's Promise Alliance

A youth partnership team with 10 - 15 youth from across the nation helps to lead and guide America's Promise Alliance. The alliance, started by General Colin Powell, is dedicated to "forging a strong and effective partnership alliance committed to seeing that children experience the fundamental resources they need to succeed." The youth on the team are full voting members of the Alliance Board of Directors and Trustees. They participate in conference calls, online chats, and in-person meetings in Washington, D.C. <http://www.americaspromise.org/>

Youth/Adult Partnership Academy

The Youth/Adult Partnership Academy brings teams of youth and adults together from their home communities. In partnership, they go through an intensive training to enhance their leadership and partnership skills. The academy is geared toward helping young people and the adults they work with to improve programs, policy and practices for young people. Attending this academy will allow participants to build skills and knowledge that will help them support youth advisory groups and other activities that involve young people on a local, state and national level. <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/conferences/yap07/about.html>

California Youth Connection

The California Youth Connection is guided, focused and driven by current and former foster youth with the assistance of other committed community members. California Youth Connection promotes the participation of foster youth in policy development and legislative change to improve the foster care system. California Youth Connection strives to improve social work practice and child welfare policy. <http://www.cal youthconn.org/site/cyc/>

Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team

The Youth Leadership Advisory Team is a team of Maine youth in care (in state custody), ages 14-21, engaged in the education of the government, general public, caregivers and peers regarding the needs of children and young adults in the child welfare system. Advocating for positive changes in the child welfare system, Youth Leadership Advisory Team members help develop, guide and revise the Bureau of Child and Family Services policies to create safety, comfort and opportunities for all kids in care. <http://www.ylat.org/>

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The Colorado Experience

Since 2000, the Youth Partnership for Health (YPH) has provided recommendations to many initiatives and programs; written articles for prevention newsletters; developed a DVD on its work; provided consultation and technical assistance to other groups; and presented at statewide conferences.

YPH's Motto

Nothing about us without us!

Colorado's Youth Partnership for Health (YPH) is dedicated to helping Colorado communities by advising the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and its partners on health issues affecting young people across the state. In addition, YPH advocates for Colorado youth by taking on special projects and participating in statewide conferences.

Youth help make decisions, provide insight and give advice to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment on a wide spectrum of topics on adolescent health. They work directly with the adults who help make decisions affecting youth in Colorado. Every month, they meet to learn about important teen issues and develop recommendations.

Who are the Youth? They are a group of energetic young people, 14-18 years old, from across Colorado who are enthusiastic about shaping how Colorado responds to important youth issues that we all experience. They work directly with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to inform its efforts and efforts of other state leaders. They are willing to talk about hard issues, learn about health and other youth issues, and dedicate four hours a month to this important work.

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YPH began in 2000 and has been meeting monthly since that time; however, participants do take a break during the summer months. YPH began out of the realization that youth voice is vital to any successful program targeting youth. It continues because it has proven to be a successful model of engaging youth leadership in policy and program decision-making.

Issues YPH has Helped Address in Colorado

- ◆ Positive youth development
- ◆ Substance use/abuse
- ◆ HIV and STD prevention
- ◆ Youth leadership
- ◆ Teen pregnancy and parenting
- ◆ Health and fitness
- ◆ Depression and suicide
- ◆ Eating disorders
- ◆ Teen motor vehicle safety
- ◆ Mental health

- ◆ Violence - gang, sexual, relationship
- ◆ Diverse needs of urban, rural and frontier schools and communities
- ◆ Body image and media
- ◆ Self-mutilation / cutting
- ◆ Healthy eating habits / nutrition
- ◆ Child abuse
- ◆ Comprehensive health education in schools
- ◆ Peer pressure

YPH Meeting Structure

A typical YPH meeting begins with introductions and an icebreaker question or activity, followed by lunch. After lunch, a health issue is presented to the group for feedback. The group often breaks into smaller groups to analyze, discuss and provide feedback to the larger group. After YPH recommendations are compiled and finalized, the meetings usually end with reflections of the meeting and completion of mileage, stipend and evaluation forms.

Please refer to the Appendices section for sample materials - i.e. agenda, sign-in sheet, mileage and stipend forms, etc.

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Example of Accomplishments from the YPH Evaluation

In the fall of 2007, an evaluation was conducted of the YPH goals. Two types of outcomes were found: behavior and attitude changes and program and practice changes. These same types of outcomes have been found with other youth-adult partnerships.

The behavioral and attitude changes of the participants included being more open to discuss sensitive topics with youth, listening to youth better, wanting to ask more in-depth and sophisticated questions in the future, and learning how to phrase things so that youth "take it seriously."

One respondent reported that he was taught how to phrase questions to youth who are parents in a more sensitive way and another respondent reported learning how to phrase questions in a more culturally respectful way.

The program and practice outcomes included the following:

- ◆ A change in the graduated driver's licensing social marketing campaign by the Colorado Department of Transportation that will affect approximately 89,000 new drivers per year. Youth advisory members also reported they would follow the law if their parents enforced it.
- ◆ A change in a data collection tool for a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant at the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The youth's input and the improved tool resulted in helping move Colorado's approach to pregnancy prevention from an abstinence-only approach to comprehensive evidence or science-based approaches to pregnancy prevention.
- ◆ Changes to a statewide survey to assess attitudes about barriers to contraception used to prevent teen pregnancy. Changes were made to the survey to be more culturally respectful of youth and to include an at-risk population not previously identified. The results from this survey are being used for statewide policy change and education.

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- ◆ A change in strategies for communication with teens regarding a pregnancy prevention program. The timing of meetings for teens, payment to the teens, structure of parental involvement, location of intervention and strategies for communication with teens about pregnancy issues were all changed in response to youth input.
- ◆ A change in a statewide sunscreen education and promotion program. The campaign has been implemented and to date has distributed 17,000 tip cards, offered education to approximately 600 teachers in all K-8 schools in Colorado, and provided online training for more than 200 people.
- ◆ A change in the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) high school seat belt policy. This policy will be distributed to all high schools in Colorado and can be individually adopted by each superintendent or school district official. The youth who participated in this YPH meeting told CDOT they would be more likely to obey their high schools' seat belt policy and encourage their friends to obey their high schools' seat belt policy because they participated in creating the policy.
- ◆ The University of Colorado at Denver Health Sciences Center used the YPH as a pilot to assess barriers to seeking help from adults when youth are suicidal. These data were added to the Health Sciences Center's research data, reported at two conferences and shared with more than 200 youth in one high school.

Other Accomplishments

YPH also has engaged in many other activities over the last few years. While it is important to track outcomes like the ones above, it also is important for any youth-adult partnership to document the activities the partners successfully undertake together:

- Provided input and recommendations for various adolescent health initiatives such as

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- The Colorado Association of School Based Health Care
 - The State Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership
 - The Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition Program
 - The Youth Risk Behavior Survey
 - The Colorado Coordinated School Health Initiative
 - The Colorado Abstinence Education Program
 - Rocky Mountain Public Health Consortium
 - Cardiovascular Risk Reduction
 - Colorado's 2003 Adolescent Health Report
- Wrote articles for the Partners in Prevention Newsletter on youth involvement and developmental assets
 - Provided technical assistance to organizations starting a youth advisory board such as Colorado Minority Health Forum and Kaiser Permanente
 - Served as workshop assistants (introduced speakers, greeted and assisted attendees, worked the registration table and provided a visible youth presence) at the 2002 Colorado Association of School-Based Health Care Convention and the 2008 Voices of Strength Conference
 - Conducted a youth panel and presentation at the 2005 and 2006 Voices of Strength Conferences
 - Developed an original DVD video presentation, "Nothing About Us Without Us"

Starting a Youth-Adult Partnership

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Starting a Youth-Adult Partnership

Youth-adult partnerships can be initiated by organizations or by youth. Regardless of who develops the idea of a youth-adult partnership, both the youth and adults need to design the fundamental plan for the effort together - from the beginning.

Different Youth-Adult Partnership Approaches

Starting a youth-adult partnership requires understanding the goal of the partnership. Different approaches to partnerships will meet different goals. A few of the well-known areas for involving youth include the following (Justinianno & Scherer, 2001; Power, 2005):

◆ **Youth as Planners:** Bringing youth in from the beginning, when a new program or policy is being developed, can help ensure success from Day One! Don't limit youth involvement to being advisors. The youth also can be on staff or on the adult decision-making board.

◆ **Youth as Trainers:** Youth can help train adults and other youth in how to provide services to youth, how to participate in youth-adult partnerships and many other topics! Youth can participate in identifying training needs, developing training materials, training to become trainers and implementing the training.

◆ **Youth as Evaluators:** Youth not only can help identify what "success" really looks like, they also can collect the data and help interpret it. In fact, there is no part of evaluation that cannot include a youth component. Researchers working with youth may find they are helpful in creating surveys, conducting interviews, interpreting findings or presenting results.

Within each of these areas, youth can serve as partners in different ways. A few formal structures that youth-adult partnerships have taken include the following (Justinianno & Scherer, 2001; Power, 2005):

◆ **Youth Advisory Boards:** Youth advisory boards/councils/committees may be charged with a specific issue to provide advice about or may be asked to

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- ◆ Are youth ready to take on more responsibilities?
- ◆ Do adults and youth have the skills to partner together effectively?

If these conditions are met, it's time to start a partnership!

Tips for Starting a Youth-Adult Partnership

(Adapted from Justinianno & Scherer, 2001; Power, 2005)

There are many things to figure out. Some of the issues to consider are listed below:

Organization and adult readiness

Building a framework

Finding the resources

Identifying an adult ally

Defining roles and responsibilities

Recruiting youth broadly

Recruiting organizations broadly

Marketing the partnership

Structuring the group

Figuring out how to use time

Orientations and trainings

Developing an action plan

Personal reflection and evaluation

Process and outcome evaluation

Measures of success

Recognizing youth and adult members

Including the "fun" factor

The many successful youth-adult partnerships already underway have a lot of advice to offer on all of these issues:

1. **Assess organization and adult readiness.** You will need to find answers to questions such as: What are adult attitudes in the organization toward youth? Is the organizational structure able to support a partnership?
2. **Build a framework.** Gather a group of young people and a few adults to define the purpose of the advisory board and define the framework of how it will work. Some issues to address include membership, recruitment, application and selection process, role of the host organization, structure, funding and logistics.

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3. **Find the resources.** With the framework in mind, secure a funding source either from your host organization or from an outside source. This money will pay for meetings in a friendly meeting environment, stipends, materials, travel expenses, site visits, staff time and food (a vital component!).
4. **Identify an adult ally.** Determine who the staff contact will be and make sure that key staff members are brought in to meet and connect with the advisory board members. Be sure it is someone who “gets” youth-adult partnerships.
5. **Define roles and responsibilities.** Be sure to clarify roles and responsibilities for both the advisory board members and the adult allies.
6. **Recruit youth broadly.** Send applications to all junior high and high schools, colleges, and community groups in the area. Develop and stick to the timeline for recruitment and selection; identify ways to recruit diverse participation (culturally, socio-economically, geographically). Also remember that for thorough and comprehensive youth participation, you must recruit from broadly diverse backgrounds. For example, try to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered (GLBT) youth; male youth; female youth; diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages; youth with mental health care needs; youth with developmental disabilities; youth with substance abuse issues; youth with learning disabilities; and teen parents. For more tips, see the Recruitment Tips in the *Appendices* section of this guide.
7. **Recruit adults broadly.** Look for adults to partner and connect with youth through schools, government agencies, policy-making bodies, civic organizations and parent groups, as well as through local nonprofit organizations, such as youth centers, health centers and treatment programs.
8. **Market the partnership.** Youth in your group can help create tailored materials for marketing. For example, YPH youth and adults created a DVD to explain the value of their group and youth voice to adults, youth and organizations.

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9. **Develop a Fair Application and Selection Process.** Be sure the process is transparent and that youth are involved from the beginning. Selection processes vary based upon the needs of the group. For example, processes can be based on a specific set of criteria developed by the group or they can be even based on a lottery system. The point is this: The process is up to the group and youth must help drive the process.
10. **Structure of the group.** Make sure to have adult and youth facilitators. This can be challenging and hard work, but it is well worth it.
11. **Time.** Ensure that the meeting is the appropriate length for the activities to be accomplished. Depending on the length of the meeting, include time for breaks, lunch or dinner and socializing.
12. **Provide orientation and training.** Once the group has been formed, bring members together for orientation and training. This is an important opportunity to develop skills including group facilitation, public speaking and problem-solving. Team-building exercises also help create a sense of community and purpose.
13. **Develop and implement a logic model or action plan.** Based on its purpose, have the advisory board develop a logic model or an action plan. See the *Appendices* section for further details.
14. **Provide opportunities for reflection and personal evaluation.** Have members reflect on their experience. What have they gained personally? How is the advisory board working? What are its outcomes?
15. **Process and outcome evaluation.** Formal evaluations take time and resources, but they are very important to show the difference a youth-adult partnership can make. Put an evaluation process in place that the youth help to design and implement. (See the *Evaluating a Youth-Adult Partnership section*.)

